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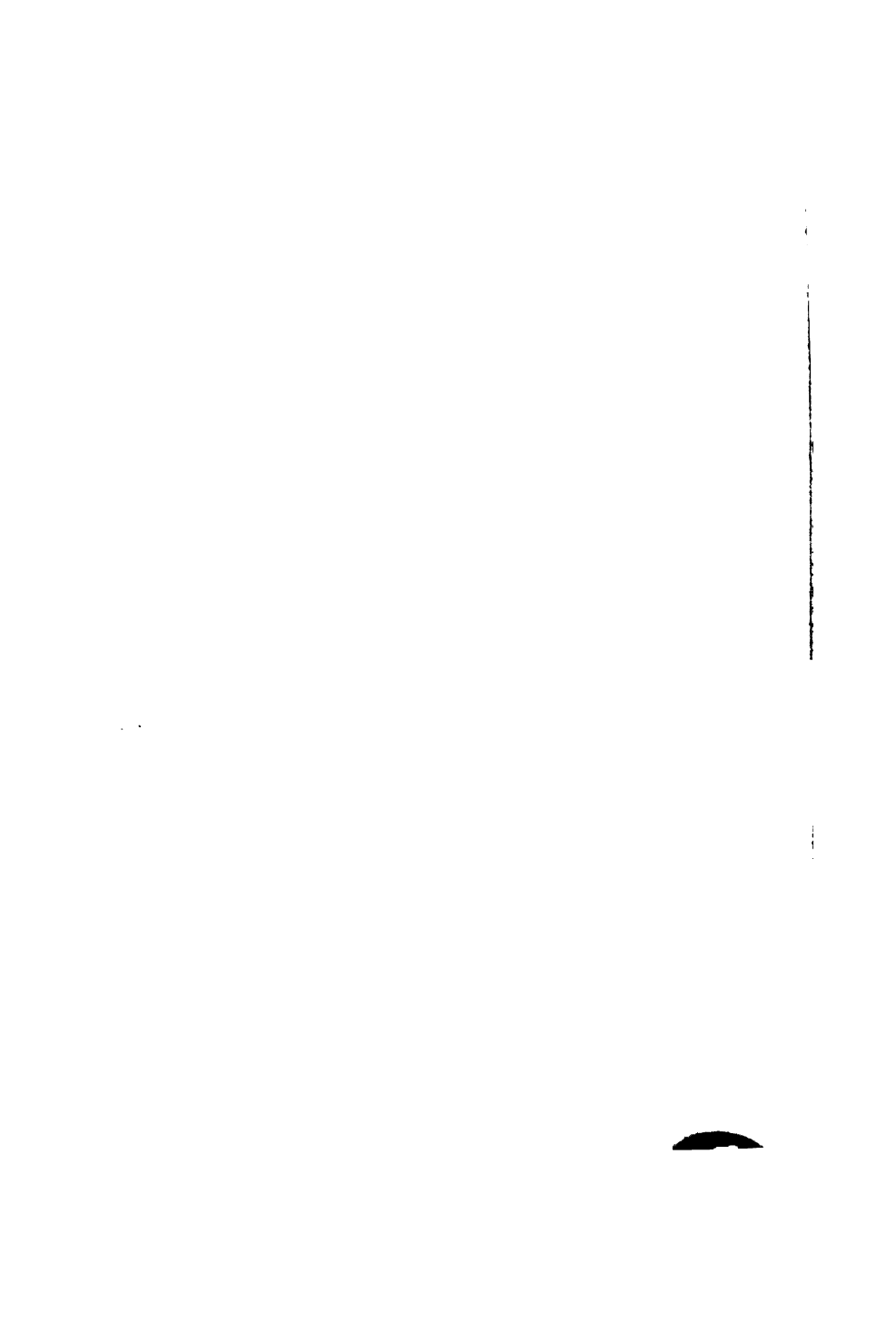


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## **The Court of Belshazzar**





# The Court of Belshazzar

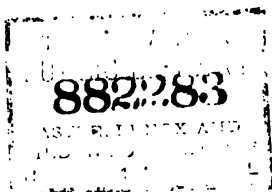
A ROMANCE OF  
THE GREAT CAPTIVITY

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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	THE SHEPHERDS . . . . .	1
II	UP TO JERUSALEM . . . . .	12
III	THE OTHER CASKET . . . . .	27
IV	A PLOT AND A LISTENER . . . . .	34
V	THE SONG OF SONGS . . . . .	42
VI	OLD JEWISH FIRES . . . . .	53
VII	INTO THE EAST . . . . .	65
VIII	THE GATE OF LIONS . . . . .	76
IX	WITHIN THE WALLS . . . . .	86
X	THE OLD WAREHOUSE . . . . .	98
XI	THE SPIDER'S DEN . . . . .	108
XII	TWO MEETINGS. . . . .	112
XIII	HIS MAJESTY . . . . .	129
XIV	THE NOBLE KADRIC . . . . .	141
XV	THE BAIT IS CAST . . . . .	145
XVI	SIGNS HIGH AND LOW . . . . .	155
XVII	ABOUT THE CEDAR CHAIR . . . . .	168
XVIII	IN THE GARDEN OF ENOS . . . . .	188
XIX	THE LAMB OF LAEL . . . . .	193
XX	THE CURRENT OF THE COURT . . . . .	203
XXI	A KING DISCONSOLATE . . . . .	208
XXII	INTO THE DUST . . . . .	214
XXIII	WHEN MAJESTY FROWNS . . . . .	235
XXIV	THE RED LESSON . . . . .	242
XXV	SHE OF THE HAIR OF GOLD . . . . .	249
XXVI	THE HOST LED OUT . . . . .	259
XXVII	THE PITS . . . . .	267
XXVIII	AS TAMMUZ CAME . . . . .	274
XXIX	THE FEAST PROCLAIMED . . . . .	277
XXX	DELIVERANCE . . . . .	287
XXXI	THE SUN GOD'S PAGEANT . . . . .	299
XXXII	THE EAR OF THE GREAT . . . . .	311
XXXIII	OLD COMRADES MEET . . . . .	316
XXXIV	THE SACRILEGE . . . . .	333
XXXV	LOOKING WESTWARD . . . . .	349



## **The Court of Belshazzar**





# The Court of Belshazzar

## CHAPTER I

### THE SHEPHERDS

A FEW miles south and west of Jerusalem, in Judea, a group of bold green hills invited the keeper of herds to tarry there, and moved the early Hebrew singers to many a flight of praise. Had any traveler from Beersheba passed that way, going up to the city or on to Jericho one afternoon in the month of Nisan, in the year 539 before the birth of Jesus, he would have seen a little tent, pitched under a sycamore tree on the northern shoulder of one of the greener knolls. Near by, in the light shade, stood a man, attired in the rudely graceful habit of a Jewish shepherd. But a traveler from Beersheba, being familiar with the sheep-masters of the region, would have observed that this one, while he wore the usual script, or wallet, had neither a sling nor any other weapon. This alone would have shaped the thought that here, whatever his raiment, was a man who did not strictly belong to the class that watched the flocks of Israel.

His figure was erect and very tall, and the flowing hair and the patriarchal beard were absolutely white. Age had set its signs in every crease of the

grave strong face. The aquiline nose and the bright dark eyes proclaimed the Jew, while the broad full brow, and a general dignity, sustained by the person altogether, bespoke a man whose life was largely of the mind. He was looking into the little vale below him; plainly he was listening also. Then a voice, a single cheery call, answered by the bleating of sheep, rang out beyond a curve of the glen. He turned to enter the tent, and his eyes caught, over the lower hills to east and north, a glimpse of sunshine on a field of broken brown and gray—the ruins of the City of David. A piteous sadness gathered in his face and he stooped and entered the tent, like one reminded of some old sorrow.

In a moment another figure came to view along a path which ran on the flank of the hill, from the lower lands; a young man, not far out of boyhood. His attire was a duplicate of that of the other, even to the absence of weapons. He moved with the lightness of a playing lamb. The carriage of the straight strong form, and the cast of the features and the flash of the eyes suggested a closer kinship to the older man than that of costume or employment. He paused, as the other had done, and looked beyond the hills to the wasted city, but if any sadness touched his heart it left no shadow on the care-free face. The old man put forth his head from the fold of the tent door:

“Hast counted them, Ariel?”

“Twice: once as they went through the gully at

.....

the head of the path and again as they entered the fold gate. Not a lamb is missing. Amos and Zael are with them."

"God is good," said the old man, as he came from the tent and stood before the youth, on each of whose broad shoulders he laid a withered hand. "Yes, Ariel, God is very good. His sheep may wander but they do not lose themselves. I saw thee looking toward Jerusalem just now. Her glory is fallen, son, but it shall shine again. Our people are infirm of faith, sometimes. Sometimes they cry aloud that the Lord hath forgotten His own. Not so."

To these assurances Ariel listened without response. Youth seldom loves the sententiousness of age. The speaker understood.

"Come, Ariel, let us go in and eat and drink. Afterward I have something to say to thee."

The space within the tent was hardly three full paces square. One side was filled by a pallet of sheepskin, rolled to give more room. A few implements of their occupation lay about, and on the floor was a coarse square carpet, or rug, of woven rushes.

From a cavernous basket the old man brought a linen cloth and spread it over the mat. A few earthen dishes were placed upon it, containing cold meat, unleaven bread, and honey and dates. The drink was water, poured from a goatskin bottle. The two, seated on rough but not uncomfortable cushions, bowed their heads while the elder gave their thanks.

When the repast was ended and its appurtenances

cleansed with water, or shaken, folded and put away, they returned to the open air. The sun had set, and a new moon, over above Beersheba, was out in company of a single star. Ariel sat on a low stool, placed beneath the tree. Against the trunk his aged companion, half reclining upon a twofold thickness of fleecy sheepskin, began:

“Ariel, knowest what day this is?”

“Yes, father, it is the eighth of Nisan.”

“The Month of the Green Ears, yes. How old art thou?”

“Twenty this day. I have watched its coming, because of what thou toldest me. I have counted the very hours: father, I am a man.”

Eagerness, strong to impatience, throbbed in the clear voice.

“Dost weary of me and my old ways, Ariel?”

A note of pathos in the question went to the heart of the youth. He answered quickly: “Nay, it is not that, it is not that. I would not leave thee; yet—I am a man. Thou hast given me hints of something which, thou saidst, might change the course of my life. I wish to hear it; I have waited long.”

“It is the way of youth, my child, the way of youth forever. The time may come when thou wilt wish that I had never spoken. But who can say! In the years that are gone, I gave my promise that this day, if it found us both alive, I would tell thee something. Had I died before thee, thou wouldst have found it, in my little cedar chest in yonder. I

was minded to tell it this morning, when I saw thee starting down the path to the fold, when the mist was lifting, but I lacked the heart to call thee back. Now the day is ended; I must speak. Art listening, Ariel?"

The youth, at the first intimation that the long-pondered mystery was about to be revealed, sat leaning toward the tree in rigid attention. He tried to calm his voice, but it shook a little as he answered:

"Yes, my father, I hear."

The next words, low and measured, struck the young heart strangely:

"Then hearken well to me, thou *Son of Levi*. The blood of patriarchs is in thee. What I am about to tell concerns not thee alone, but all the race of Israel."

The old man paused for a little space, to let the admonition work in silence. Then:

"We looked upon Jerusalem a while ago. The sight of it doth not sadden thee, for thou never sawest it in the old days; but I—O God of my fathers! can I ever forget the glory of the time when its walls were plumb; when its markets hummed with trade and the altar fires were alive on Mount Moriah! Those were blessed years, my boy, yet in them the people sinned, and God's wrath was enkindled. Armies came out of the East. They attacked the city; they threw up hills against the walls. I need not speak of that black time. Thou knowest the story well. I, I hear the shrieking, even now.

"West from the temple, in a shaded street, stood a house of matched stones. Two myrtles grew beside

## 6 THE COURT OF BELSHAZZAR

it, and the pigeons, tame as lambs, used to fly about its roof all day. A mother and her two sons dwelt there. One was scarce older than thou art. The other was a priest of the temple, near the middle of manhood.

“Down the street from the east came a torrent of soldiers, killing and burning. It was about the fourth hour of the day. They burst the door, and the sons defended the woman, as they could. The younger was struck with the flat of an ax—I never knew why it was not the bit—and lay like a dead man. The other was captured; his arms were tied, and they twisted the cords with a lance. He saw his mother shamed, then slain, while the soldiers laughed.”

The voice in the shadows ceased again, and then went on:

“When the sack was done and the army, laden with the treasures from the temple and with other spoils, set out for its own land, this same man was one of many captives. They camped the first night, close beside the Jordan. A guard, who was drunk with wine, let his spear lie over against this prisoner, on the ground. His wrists were tied, with ropes of hemp, to the wrists of others. He cut the ropes against the blade and crept away.”

“And what became of him then?” asked Ariel.

“Then he returned to the city. It was like a city of sepulchers. In the ruins of his mother’s house he found his brother, still alive. A few days later they

made their way to Jericho and stayed there till the young man's wounds were healed. They swore a great oath together to dwell in Jerusalem no more until God's people were delivered out of bondage."

"And they kept it? They did not break their covenant?"

"Aye, they kept it. They were Hebrews of the Hebrews, even as thou art. The younger was *thy father, Levi*. The other was I."

Ariel stepped closer to the old man, the darkness veiling the merriment in his face. He believed that he had caught his father twice in a slip of the tongue.

"Levi my father?"

"Yea. I, Heman, am thy uncle only."

Ariel recoiled and stood staring. The words swept something out of his life. His voice was husky and a little hard as he replied, speaking low and very slowly:

"So thou art not my father. I have been deceived. Say on; my father, Levi, what of him?"

"He saw and loved a daughter of one of the merchants of Damascus. Long after the sack of the city he took her to be his bride. He believed even then that the restoration was near and he would be close to the beloved place. So he and thy mother made their home in a little house in the edge of Bethlehem; a little house with a gourd vine on the wall, and a brood of tame doves in the apple-trees behind it. I became a shepherd. God sent thee to them, at last, and thy mother died the eighth day



afterward. She was a comely woman and righteous, Ariel. Oh, that she had lived, to rear thee as I have tried to rear thee! I have poured out prayers for my guidance; God knoweth it, too; but He hath never yet given man the soul of a mother. If He did, my boy, if He did, that man to whom the gift was given would be like to God Himself."

"I was still a little babe, thou sayest?"

"Yes, and before thy feet could bear thee up, or thy tongue speak anything aright, thy father summoned me to his house, one day when the latter rain was nigh. A fever burned him, and he knew, and gave me charge concerning thee. The third day after that he died and we laid him in the old tomb, east of the village."

The speaker halted again, but the listener was plunged in thoughts too deep for further questions.

"He had given me charge that I was to bring thee up as mine own son, to thy twentieth year. Then I was to tell all this, and to say to thee that thou art a Hebrew of the Hebrews, bound to the service of God. He willed it that, from this day forth, if the restoration of the Holy Land was yet to come, thou shouldst give all thy heart and mind and soul to hasten it. He believed, as I do, that God loveth a willing instrument, as a joiner loveth an apt tool.

"I took thee as my son, as Levi willed. I have brought thee up as a shepherd, that thou mightst be gentle as well as brave; thy mind clean and thy body strong. I bore no weapons and permitted none to

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thee. They make men bold, but not courageous. Year after year I have wandered with thee about Jerusalem's four walls. I have tried to teach thee all I knew of the lore of the Wise Men, and I say to thee now that, in my day, I was not called the least of them. Now I have told thee all. A man thou art, free now, this hour, to do whatever thou wilt. I have done as I could, by thee, and I am still thy father in my love."

The moon was dipping to a hilltop when the story was done. At the end the old man came from his place beneath the tree. Ariel arose, passed his palm across his brow, then threw his arms about the towering figure and embraced him. The caress was mutual, silent, minutes long.

"I thank thee, father—I still call thee father—for all thy care of me," he said, when at last their arms fell from about each other's shoulders. "If I fail in any duty the fault is none of thine. My father, Levi, willed that I should do whatever I could to hasten the liberation of the race?"

"It was his last charge."

The young voice boomed in its eagerness:

"Then tell me again of our people in Ur of the Chaldees. I listen with new ears to-night!"

Heman thanked the darkness that hid his tears as he began:

"Thou knowest, Ariel, that over yonder"—he pointed eastward—"a weakling sits upon a throne. Within his capital an hundred thousand Jews, his captives in name, and captives indeed to the abominations

of the place, await the deliverer's hand. As the great Isaiah foretold it, the time is almost come, and Habakkuk and Jeremiah and Ezekiel have cried aloud, foretelling the tyrant's doom. And there the friend of my youth, he whom the Chaldees call by a hateful name of their own, but who is Daniel to the Hebrews, labors in the mighty cause. A handful of others labor with him, some of them worthy, some unworthy. He and they are at their work this night. They have been there long, and they must labor on and on. Our Lord hath set them there, as torches, to rekindle the national spirit of the race."

The young man clenched his fists and raised them aloft: "Good God, thou, father, why was I never told—why wait till year upon year wore out—I have been a man in strength for long!"

"Hark, Ariel; God can raise up men to do His will. Moreover, he that watcheth the flocks, is not he, too, a laborer in the holy cause?"

"I! Shall I watch flocks while the bonds of my people call me! Shall I tarry here when Israel crieth aloud! Not I, by the beard of him that begat me! It is clear as the noon sun: I am going to Bab——"

"No, no!" cried Heman, waving his hands in sudden protest. "Say not those words to-night. Another time! Another time! We have talked too long. My old head swims with what I have told, and thine, poor boy, is burning with things that are strange and new. Until to-morrow—until to-morrow, let me be thy father and be thou my son, as we have been so

long. Come into the tent. We will say our prayers together and sleep on our pallet as we always have, forgetting until the morning all that passed between us. Come."

A little afterward, their outer garments cast off, they were lying side by side, the dark thick mass of the younger locks and the old man's snowy hair meeting in deep confusion on their simple pillow.

With the surge of new emotions through his brain, the nephew fought off sleep. A great bright way seemed suddenly hewn across the world for him. Phantom armies marched at the order of his fancy and he seemed to hear the fanfare of trumpets, the thunder of rushing hosts and the clatter of arms above it all. Then, all in a moment, the wand of slumber struck him, once, and the touch was light and sure.

Hearing the easy measured breathing, Heman, careful to avoid disturbance of the slumberer, arose and left the tent, and looked away northeastward under the brilliant sky. Then he sought that part of the slope which most directly faced Jerusalem. Sinking upon his knees, with his hands uplifted and clasped, he called on the God of the Jews to remember His children; to deliver them out of the foul embrace of the mighty Harlot of the East; and over and over again to be mindful of Ariel, son of Levi; to sustain him, and to keep him clean, and to be with him all along the dangerous pathway of his ardent choosing.

11

## CHAPTER II

### UP TO JERUSALEM

**H**EMAN was up at the first suggestion of dawn, next morning. The youth was still asleep, with half-connected threads of the last night's story running grotesquely through his head. The uncle bent fondly over the supine figure for a moment before he could bring himself to break the dreams.

"Ariel," he called softly, "awake, my boy, and arise; the morning is wondrous fair. Come, son, the day is born."

By way of response the young man clamped his eyelids together and rolled luxuriously over upon his face, in which position he settled more deliciously to slumber. Heman, busied with the preparations for their breakfast, wheeled and viewed the listless form through knitted brows, while he twitched at his beard with a corded hand.

"Ariel, hey! get thee up; it is almost sunrise. Come!"

The object of the homely entreaty yawned and threw his long, straight, sun-browned arms aloft and drew them down till the muscles billowed beneath the skin. Then Heman knelt beside the pallet and shook him. In another minute he was racing down the hillside toward the brook. When he returned, face, neck and arms were glistening from the cool plunge.

A meal more simple even than that of the evening was prepared. They ate in silence, for each was full of many thoughts. When they were through the uncle spoke:

"Last night I asked thee not to say what thy mind was fixed upon. Now speak, if thou wilt."

Ariel stood up:

"I am going to Babylon to be with Daniel."

"I have foreknown it long. I have hoped for the coming of this day, and dreaded it also. I will miss thee, boy. The hills will be so lonesome——" His voice broke and he turned away.

Who has not, sometime, desired and resolved to do a thing, then had desire and resolution shaken, suddenly, nearly to destruction, by the realization that the doing would pain some loved one, powerless to prevent! Such feeling came to Ariel. With it came a fleeting thought of urging the uncle to go with him. But he had too often heard those old lips make the hills ring, saying that rather would he pluck his eyes from their sockets than gaze upon the abominations of the heathen. Heman came to his relief:

"And when art thou going, my child?"

"To-day," he cried, delighted to hear his high decision thus accepted.

"A-hah! So soon? And how?" A smile shone through the beard of the questioner.

Of this the son of Levi had not thought. His agile fancy had foreseen himself, established somewhere in Babylon, laboring day and night with Daniel

and his faithful ones, arousing the Jews by thousands, and at last, by way of acme, leading the whole race out of bondage, under Belshazzar's nose, and into Jerusalem, there to rebuild the temple of the True God. It appeared to him to be a great but simple operation, singularly lacking in particulars. He had not even reckoned of the half thousand miles of sun-beaten sand which lay between him and the pagan capital.

The uncle's smile grew doubly tender: "Bless the Lord, my son, that I am here to think for thee. Thou art boy and man in the same body. There is much to do; camels must be bought, and a trusty guide must be found, and provisions shall be laid in before thou leavest. In Jerusalem, the Hebrew Bilhan expecteth us. I close my eyes to his frivolities, for he knoweth our purpose, and Babylon's ways. In the house of his fathers, over against the Gate of Benjamin, I have no doubt he listeneth for our coming, even now. Art ready, Ariel?"

The setting forth was unattended by any preparations, except that each of them filled himself with a deep draught out of the goatskin bottle. Heman brought from among his few belongings a curious chest of cedar, fastened with clasps of gold and covered with writing which Ariel could not read. Clasping the chest to his bosom, his staff in his free hand, Heman descended the hill by a narrow path which continually lost itself ahead of him. Ariel, full of unwasted strength, disdained the path but kept by the old man's side.

They held their course, to east and north, along that way on which, some twenty-four centuries later, a conquering English army was to march, to bring to old Jerusalem a new redemption. At mid-forenoon they turned from the devious trail into the broader road which ran from Hebron to the city. By it they came directly into the little village of Bethlehem.

They halted at the west gate long enough to refresh themselves with drink from an old well in the shadow of the wall, then entered and traversed the place. Its single street was flanked with dwellings of brick or clay, so shattered as to hint that Jerusalem had not been the only spoil of the warriors who had gone that way in the past.

The endless and seemingly aimless comings and goings of dark-eyed women, dressed in loose and often slovenly robes of coarse white cloth, barefooted, bare-headed, bare-armed and carrying earthen jars upon their shoulders or brown reed baskets in their hands, made a sight of novel interest to Ariel. His uncle strode along as though he were still in the pastures. With many a backward and sidelong look, the youth kept near him. Dogs of the village skulked inquiringly after them, and troops of children, giving way as they approached, stared as they passed with that blank fixedness which utter innocence gives to the stranger. At the eastern side they entered a path which dropped down into a rocky gorge. There, jutting out of the hillside, was a sepulcher of heavy stones. Before this structure, which, rude though it was, stood



with a kind of plain grace, Heman halted, leaning wearily upon his staff.

"Here sleep thy father and thy mother."

The youth, not having known his parents, was moved by the emotion of his uncle, rather than by any sorrow of his own. To Heman the place was alive with memories. Surrendering to a simple impulse, common among a simple people, now, like many simple things, gone out of the fashion, he leaned above the coping and his tears streamed through his parted fingers. Ants had heaped a little red peak of earth from the embankment out upon the shelving roof. He brushed away both workers and work, with a petulant hand. Then, in obedience to a prompting as old as love or the consciousness of loss, he plucked up a cluster of crimson anemones and laid them over the stone at the door.

"My boy, thou art going to Babylon?"

"Yes, my father."

"With a clean heart and a mind to do the will of the Lord?"

"He heareth me: yes."

"And thou wilt shun all manner of evil?"

"I will."

"Swear, then: swear by the Fear of thy Father!"

Ariel stretched his hands above the sepulcher and looking upward, repeated the simplest and most solemn of old Hebrew oaths.

Midday was past when they entered Jerusalem, going in by the Valley Gate in the west side. It was

little more than a rent in the masonry, lying as King Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers had left it, half a century before. The hammer-marks of violence were upon it and everywhere within it. Ruins lay in all directions. Fragments of old clay walls, yet standing, had become the nesting place of birds. Lizards, conforming in color to whatsoever they rested upon, awoke from their naps in the sun and scurried under heaps of stones. The street that led on into the city was narrow and rough and closely flanked with nettles.

A few steps through the gate the old man halted and looked back on the ruined portal, then forward over the shattered city. His right hand clutched the staff and struck it upon the ground for emphasis:

"Again. Again. Not since the siege have I seen the inside of thy walls, my city. I vowed that I would look on thee no more till God's children were free. To-day I break my vow, but it is broken in the Cause." Then, to his companion: "Look about thee, Ariel; see what the Chaldee jackals did! The gate, the walls, the houses yonder! Once they were the apple of the Lord's eye; look at them! Now, picture to thy mind the doing of this destruction. Imagine it; thou must! The shrieks of outraged mothers; the blows of maces on the skulls of little ones; the groans of good men hewn down. I saw it, and I heard!"

He passed his hand over his eyes, then his voice arose higher: "Ariel, Son of Levi, thou art going to seek the cursed Chaldee in his home. In God's name, do unto him as he did unto us in his day!"

The young face was all gravity. The young eyes, full of good humor a moment before, now answered the fire in the old ones, looking into them.

"What thou sayest I will do to the heathen, and more, God willing. I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews."

What had been fierce and bitter in the old man's visage was softened and became pure fondness.

"How like thy father thou art—thy father, Levi. It seemeth yesterday that he was a youth, like thee. Oh, Ariel, thy sire, my baby brother, liveth again in thee. Remember that, remember that. Now come."

In toward the heart of the city signs of a population began to appear. A vender of fruits stepped into an angle of a wall to let them pass, but he offered nothing for sale. They saw a mason, with his plummet and trowel, standing before what once had been a goodly house. At the next bend in the way Ariel looked back. The man was standing still, in the same position. Everywhere there was the hush of commercial death.

Tending always to the northeast, they kept their way through streets that dodged and bent like sheep paths. Finally, turning into a little lane which branched abruptly from the thoroughfare, they reached a private walk, set close with flowering acacia, grown so dense that the nether leaves were still damp with the dew of the morning.

"Here dwelleth Bilhan," said the uncle, as he knocked with his staff on a door in a sheer wall. An unctuous voice, somewhere within, sang out to them *to enter and be at peace.*

On through a vestibule they reached the large main chamber of a house which had been splendid in its time. High latticed windows admitted the air. The blue and yellow marble floor sent grateful coolness to the soles of their feet, through the bull's hide sandals.

Standing in the middle of the place, his arms extended in welcome, was Bilhan, the master. Both the visitors knew him by long association, yet his house was strange to them, and his dress was unfamiliar, even outlandish. He was a Jew, as plainly as either of them, but he had what they had not—a governed craftiness of eye and gesture—an air that somehow kept well with his garments. His sandals, unlike theirs, covered only half the feet, from the heels forward. The latches, over the insteps, were studded with chips of shell. Around the edges of his robe of flowing purple there was a fringe of long white tassels. A delicate golden chain, looped round his neck, fell to his loins and supported a little ivory image of the moon. He was quite beyond the prime of life and his muscles were gone to seed in fat, but the well-groomed look of the man of the world was still about him. He clapped his hands, and a serving maid came in with a bowl and scented water and towels, to bathe the feet of the guests. Bilhan embraced the old man first:

“Ah, Heman, my friend, be at ease. I welcome thee. An hour ago I listened to hear thy staff on the door. Ho, girl, a gourd of good cold water for the

worthy Heman." Then, to the youth: "And thou, young friend, art weary? Not much? I am not surprised. Jehovah, Heman, what a pair of legs he hath! He could run in the royal races in Babylon. Hast told him all about himself?"

Heman had sat down on a padded couch in the center of the chamber. "My nephew will speak for himself," he said, as he set the cedar chest on the floor and leaned his staff on the seat beside him.

"Yes, my uncle hath told me everything," said Ariel, speaking with that declamatory effect which comes of youth's self-consciousness. "Last night, as we sat by the door of our tent, he told me. I am the son of Levi, who willed that I give my mind and my body to hasten the deliverance of the Jews."

Heman looked proudly upon the youth, and from the youth to Bilhan. "And what more?" asked Bilhan.

"What more?" Ariel threw his hand out toward the East, in a sweeping gesture: "Over the desert yonder our people serve a heathen king in his wicked city."

"Aye, so they do. I have seen them serving," Bilhan chuckled.

Heman's beard worked at the corners of his mouth, and his eyes emitted sparks of disapproval. "Art sure thou didst not serve him rather faithfully thyself, hah, Bilhan? Let the boy proceed."

Thus encouraged Ariel continued: "Jerusalem cries out for the lost ones to come back to her. I know my duty." He paused, for the import of his words to sink

far in. "I now know, too, why it was that my uncle taught me so many things that a shepherd need not know. And I know why thou, good Bilhan, hast come to us regularly, out at the sheepfold, to teach me the Chaldean tongue. My uncle knew, in his heart, what I would do, when I learned the will of my father."

"Yea, that I did, my child; thou art a Hebrew of the Hebrews," Heman cried, as he gazed on the radiant face.

"So thou art resolved?" queried Bilhan.

"I am."

"Bravely said, bravely said. I knew thy father. He was a worthy man, not quite so well set up as his son, as I remember. Twenty years old! In Babylon thou mightst pass for twenty and five if thy beard were out a little. Art perfectly sure that thy heart is undivided—that thou art going for the Cause, and not to slip away and drink Median wine, and look the women in the eyes——"

"Hold, there!" burst out the uncle. "Why sayest such things to the youth? It vexeth me, Bilhan. Have I not kept him clear of all contamination; from the very dream of evil? His mind is clean. He shall go to Daniel as pliant clay, for the potter's wheel."

"Finely arranged, good Heman, finely. But remember, more devilment goeth on in Babylon of a night than ten Daniels could keep away from a youth who liked it. I dwelt there long, my boy; I know."

"No doubt thou dost!" boomed Heman, compressing his lips at the last word.

One look about that chamber would have given the proof, to any one who saw it, that the master of the house had been in the East, and brought a part of it away with him. Pillows, fat with down, were heaped in every corner. Cunning chains of silver and copper, set with gems or ornaments in metal, decked the walls in vulgar plenty. Up behind the couch was an object which no orthodox Jew would have had about him—a little brown clay tablet, surmounted by a winged lion, ridden by a woman. Below the feet of the beast the clay was covered with tiny cuneiform. A sheaf of ostrich plumes lay on the couch itself.

Heman's lip curled as he surveyed these furnishings. "Bilhan, why wilt thou keep these baubles about thee? Was it not enough to live in the slime for all those years, without bringing samples and keepsakes of it, when at last thou wert weary of sin, and fled the city, and came back to this house thou wert born in?"

Bilhan was not to be cast down: "These little mementos, good Heman, are merely reminders of the old life. Seeing them, I rejoice anew that I am at home again. Ah, Babylon, it is very, very bad. Thou, Ariel, hast thou pondered well over this resolution of thine, and its dangers to thee—and the doubt of any great good coming out of it?"

Again it was Heman who spoke: "What, Bilhan, wouldst dishearten the boy! I seem to see the Almighty hand in his decision. Besides, he is pledged.

To-day, as we came through Bethlehem, I led him down to the old tomb where his father and mother sleep the sleep. And he lifted his hands and swore, by the Fear of his Father. Shall a Hebrew of the Hebrews break that oath?"

To this the nephew quickly added: "Yes, Bilhan, by the Fear of my Father I swore. I go to be with Daniel. As the prophets reckoned it the downfall of the Babylonian is at hand. Thou speakest of danger; when was a Hebrew of the Hebrews afraid to face a foe, for the cause of God! My mind is set. We came not to ask thee as to that; we came only to seek thy help in the preparations."

Heman heard this grand rebuke with enkindling face, and gave the host a glance of utter triumph. Bilhan ducked his head, lifted his hands with the palms outspread, and deftly turned the talk to other things.

In the next half-hour he told them, in response to many questions, that a one-humped dromedary, slender of build and not too young, was best for a speedy journey. He told them, too, that the great waterless ocean of restless sands held dangers unknown to shepherds; therefore the need of a guide, who knew the beasts and the route. Rightly mounted and accoutered, the journey might be made in ten days, even in nine, if all went well. Then he asked if they had considered the cost of the beasts and trappings.

"Nay, we have had no time," said Heman. "The beasts will cost something, of course, and the guide



must have his hire, but, as Jehovah liveth, this young man shall not go into Babylon a beggar, nor appear before Daniel in a shepherd's cloak."

"Nobly uttered, oh, Heman, nobly. Yet, it is easier to say these things than to bring them to pass. In the old days Jews had treasures. Now"—and he cast up his eyes, and looked at the woman, astride the lion, above the tablet. The figure was of hammered gold.

"Yes, in the old days Jews had treasures," echoed Heman. "Once the coffers in the temple on Mount Moriah, over there, were heaped with jewels, and wedges of virgin metal, and the altar was rich with precious vessels. And where is it all?"

"I have heard that the basins sit, full to the brims, in a black-dark chamber, down under the Temple of Belus, in Babylon; and it is told that the favorites of the palace sometimes sip their snow-cooled wine from the holy service," Bilhan responded, a far off look in his eyes.

"But they were not all profaned by the heathen!" yelled the old man, rising in his agitation. "Ariel, Bilhan, ye know that I was one of the priests in the temple when Jerusalem fell. But ye shall be the first of men to know what I did on that black day. I crept to the temple, by a secret way. In the treasury, I caught up some of the priceless things and put them into a hiding-place, known only to the priests. All the others that were alive had run away. It was evening-time. The city was a hell of debauch and butchery. The victors carried away the bulk of

the temple's riches, but what I hid is safe—I know it is, though never have I been there to see. Many a stone will it carve, and many a great, stout cedar beam will it join when the New Temple cometh to be raised up.”

“But the temple was pulled down and burned,” said Bilhan, whose eyes had begun to glisten at the mention of precious things.

“Yes, so it was. But know ye that Hiram Abiff, that master-builder, left, within the temple, the means to cheat those plundering devils. They, whom may the rocks and the mountains fall upon, they wrecked the house he built, but they only made that hiding-place the more secure.”

“That widow's son, ah, what a builder he was; earth never shall know his like again,” breathed Bilhan.

“Now, my nephew goeth upon a journey, in God's name, for the Jews. Had I the means of mine own, I would give them for his going. But there are many poor among these hills, and I have helped them, as I could. I hoard no treasure of my own. Therefore, as the steward of the Lord's store, I shall take from it whatever the journey requireth.”

Bilhan gave that plan his sanction, readily and with evident relief. The cause was God's, and His children's, why not the provision also? Thus he reasoned. Besides, he said, the treasure, in its hiding-place, was like a comely virgin, dwelling alone.

The story of the hoard was as new to the nephew as to the host, and the same questions were burning

in both their minds : what was the treasure, and where ; and when and how should it be gotten? Heman, looking into their faces, read their thoughts, and smiled. Then he arose, and took up the little chest which he had kept ever since the days of his priestly service, and asked to be shown to a private chamber. Bilhan went before him, farther into the house, and then returned to the wondering Ariel.

## CHAPTER III

### THE OTHER CASKET

NO race, unless it was the Hellenes, ever was endowed with deeper capacities for common enjoyment than the Jews—and Bilhan was a Jew. He had lived two-thirds of his life in Babylon, and sickened of it, and bribed his way to Jerusalem, bringing memories. Heman knew that Bilhan had no faith in the Restoration, but he knew the Aramaic tongue, and finely he taught it to Ariel, out in the pastures, under the sycamores. The words tasted good in his mouth. And now his pupil was about to go away to Babylon—that Babylon which he had loved with a love which never quite went out. Heman was hardly gone from the chamber when Bilhan was bending over Ariel, pouring into his ears such things as they had never heard:

“To Babylon, boy, to Babylon! With that face and that form of thine! To Babylon, and for what, did I hear thee say? Ah yes, to help old Daniel free the Jews. Listen, thou child of the green hills; thou knowest no more of Babylon than the mole of the vale knoweth of the snow on Tabor’s crown. To Babylon! That, son, is a city. Drop all Jerusalem into it—Jerusalem is lost, and Babylon still is Babylon. Songs, feasts, wine, dances, filling the nights and the days! Watch, or some pair of rosy lips will steal the vows from thine before thy labors begin. Father of all,

what a thing is youth, and health, and fire! Daniel, what knowest thou of him? That he is holy? It may be so. What knowest thou of the Jews, that we say are in bondage? That they are wickedly kept there? All the same——”

“All the same they are God’s chosen!” To Ariel’s mind this babble stunk of sacrilege.

“So be it, but if they laugh at thee, be not broken-hearted. Remember that life, mere living, is very tolerable, whether one live in Jerusalem or not, and whether one bow to one god, or to many, or to none. The things one eats, the liquids he takes, the robes he wears, the odors he breathes and the lips he kisses—they are a good round share of it all, my son. I am old; I know. Hush, Heman is coming.”

As the old man reentered the room they both stared hard, struck first by the thought that a stranger had emerged in his stead. The shepherd’s garments were gone. He came out in a long loose robe of yellowish, twined linen, held about the throat with a blue string. Tiny cell-like meshes were worked all over its surface. Around and around it, from armpits to waist, a broad filmy band, blue, purple and white, was loosely wound. The ends, knotted over the groin, fell down to the hem of the garment. On his head was perched a sugar-loaf turban, dingy white. The raiment, indelibly wrinkled by long confinement in crowded space, still invested its wearer with a degree of dignity. To the eyes of any child of any of the ten tribes, garments

such as these were not to be mistaken. They announced a priest of the House of God.

"Jehovah," Bilhan chuckled. "A while ago I heard thee say rough things about my little keepsakes from the Lady of Empires. Is not my guest a little of a worldling, too, to deck himself in the trappings of an office which is dead?"

"Dead!" Heman glared. "Utter that not again. Is God dead! Say! Is He destroyed because His temple is ashes! These are the robes of His service. In them I served Him aforetime. In them, by the beard of the fathers, I will serve Him again this day. I did not put these on, my friend, to bring back the flavor of some old rottenness to roll as a morsel under my tongue! Not only was I a priest; I am still a priest! Come with me. I will show ye both."

Bilhan quailed at the thrust. Even his buoyant suavity could devise no suitable rejoinder. With Ariel, he left the house at Heman's heels and followed through a maze of narrow by-streets toward Moriah.

The hill, which the temple builders had faced on every side with solid masonry, and which a threefold wall had once encircled, stood at the northeast corner of Jerusalem. It shared, in full, that aspect of forgetfulness which belonged to every part. As the three toiled up its south acclivity, over loose stones and through thickets of nettles and young thorns, Heman's sacerdotal clothing seemed as grotesquely out of keeping with the scene as did the dandified gear of Bilhan.

Reaching the chief elevation, which was a level expanse, made so by the engineers five centuries before, they stood at the edge of what appeared to be a tiny field. Weeds and grasses clothed it. A ragged line of great stones, lying about the border, defined the main foundation site.

Causing the others to halt at the very edge, Heman took off his sandals. His companions asked no question. That before him was holy ground. Barefooted and alone he advanced across what once had been the temple floor.

At the east side there was a heap of stones larger than any other heap, and so lying as to give a hint of its having been placed so by design. Behind it Heman disappeared. Bilhan moved furtively along the edge to the eastward, unable to contain his curiosity. Either he was slow or Heman was swift, for before he gained a point from which he could see behind the pile the old man came from his hiding. Bilhan darted back. The priest was carrying something in his hands, but as he came nearer he put it into the bosom of his robe. Still leading the way, he returned to Bilhan's house.

In the center of the triangle which they formed at his bidding, he set his burden on the floor and unwound from it layer after layer of molded cloth, disclosing at last an oval object, dull yellowish in color, and double the size of a grown pomegranate, which its color and shape suggested. The top was an unhinged lid. He

lifted it away and plowing with his fingers into its depths, brought up a handful of loose jewels.

"See here," he said, "and here." He turned a ruby and a sapphire over in his palm. "Gaze on that amethyst! David's royal fingers once held that up to the light. And look at this blue-green beryl. The earth and the heavens of spring morning are blended there; and this!" He took out a great, clear emerald, with a tiny inscription cut into its cheek, and held it before their eyes in turn. Bilhan could not decipher the etching, but Ariel spelled out the one word "LEVI."

"Levi it is, the third begotten son of Jacob, boy, and thine own ancestor. Know ye that this gem once shone at the top of the middle row in Solomon's breastplate! Ah, those Chaldee wolves, had they known that one of the basins was missing from the treasury they would have beaten the last foundation stone to dust but they had found it. They ripped the walls apart, but Hiram, the widow's son, was as great a mason as Solomon was a king. He made a place——"

"Yes," murmured Bilhan, leaning forward, cunning written so broadly in his look that even Heman saw and knew it.

"A place which I have found sufficient to its use. I know the secret. All the others who knew are dead. Thou mightest search about that heap of stones till thy hair is like lime and thou couldst not solve the



little riddle that guards it." . As if to punctuate, the old man dropped Solomon's emerald into its place and clapped on the golden lid till it rang.

"It is as if God Himself had opened His treasury to provide for me," cried Ariel. "Surely I will need but a little part of all that heap. I know not much of the worth of those things, but thou hast enough in there to buy all Jerusalem, hast thou not?"

"I? I have nothing; it is God's. It is great, as thou sayest, and a little part will take thee to Daniel as thou oughtest to go. But the remainder will be needed, it and more, when the lost ones come and set about restoring yonder hill. Couldst thou have seen what the despoilers carried away—this little casket is a single sunbeam to a summer noon. But we waste the moments. Bilhan, thou knowest best who dealeth in camels and housings and clothing, in this poor shadow of a city; also who best can be trusted as a guide. Thou shouldst know, too, what we must pay for these things."

"There are several camel traders of my passing acquaintance, and some few tailors, still. But which is the worthiest I must inquire a little before I tell thee. Besides, it is evening. Calm thyself, good Heman; even this strong-limbed youth is tired. It is rest-time. We will eat and drink, and talk of the old days, and the new days, too. The treasure will be safe, in here, as though it slept in its own little mortise, or whatever it is. To-morrow we will go forth and  
tain."

Pressed by the host, and indeed by his own deep weariness, the old man agreed, eager though he and Ariel were to continue the preparations. Resuming his usual clothing, and hiding the casket under the pallet in his chamber, he was ready to take his share of the bread, the kid, the fruit and the wine which Bilhan ordered to be brought to them. Afterward they sat, in the light of a torch on the wall, and Bilhan talked of Babylon. He talked of its hugeness, its splendor, its mysteries, its Jews and its Daniel, but mostly, as it seemed to them, he talked of its incessant gaiety and its lawless love. Heman, again and again, broke in to ask that the ears of innocence be spared from this or that. At such times it was better, no doubt, for his peace of mind, that the half darkness hid the rampant deviltry that sparkled in the speaker's eyes.

Bilhan, thanks to his eastern training, kept ungodly hours by habit. But this night the darkness had no more than settled securely, and the provincial visitors had shown no sign of drowsiness, when his talk began to stumble and drag, and to suffer the interruption of laborious yawns. Then he led them to their chamber door, and wished the ninefold balms of Gilead upon their slumber. They heard his sandals shuffle and clink across the marble toward his own room, but they could not see him when he reached it. There his drowsiness left him. Changing his day-gear for sober and dark apparel, he slipped a two-edged knife inside his girdle and set forth on an errand of his own.

## CHAPTER IV

### A PLOT AND A LISTENER

**I**N ONE of the suburbs of the city which, because of its original modesty, had escaped the full effect of Babylonian despoilation, and was now in better state than the most, the innkeeper, Kallai, lived and dreamed. It was well for Kallai that he dreamed, and found some joy therein, for the world provided him little of substance. He bred some camels, and now and again sold one, when chance or curiosity brought some one over the desert to that dry spring of trade. Visions of the Return, and times when the old khan might be rebuilt and enlarged, were with him always. Sometimes, indeed, despondency would touch him, as he sat in his little square dark house, overlooking the small enclosure where he taught young camels to kneel. At such times Nana, his daughter, was wont to sit beside him, with her forearms resting across his knees, and to look up into his face and say:

“Be not cast down, my father; happier days are coming. And then, while I have thee and thou hast me, why should we grieve? No, no, look not away from thy little Nana. Look into my eyes, and put thy lips against my brow.” Then, while she strummed away on a poor old harp, which had lost two strings, she would sing that psalm which runs:

“God is our refuge and our strength,  
 A very present help in trouble;  
 Therefore we will not fear  
 Though the earth be removed, and though the  
 mountains  
 Be carried into the midst of the sea.”

By the time she had reached the end the old mood of the meliorist had usually returned, and he would go about humming with the shallow content of an insect.

These two were the only inmates of the house. There were indications that one of them might go to dwell in another place, for Zeth, a dull and lusty youth, whose mother kept a loom, and who herded a little flock of goats of his own, spent long and hungry afternoons there, sitting slouchily by the door-beam and devouring Nana with his eyes. He spoke little; that chiefly with intent of impressing Kallai with the worth of his herd. Sometimes his visits were prolonged till nightfall, when the three would sit inside the house and the crippled harp would twang accompaniment to the untaught beauty of the girl's voice.

It was on one of these occasions, and a barbarous folk chant was near its ending, when soft footfalls crunched outside the door and a softer voice called. Kallai snatched a candle from a socket in the wall and caught up a club from the corner. Then he peered fearfully around the door-post and inquired who

waited without. In those times he who went about Jerusalem by night was not offended at such precautions.

"Peace, friend Kallai, give me thy ear for a little while. My business is of importance, else I should have waited till the morning."

"Enter, good Bilhan, and be welcome. Nana, my darling, go thou into the farther chamber, and let us speak in private."

Lighting another candle, she disappeared. Zeth went through the outer doorway, awkwardly reluctant. The men sat on a low bench, faces close together. Glancing about him, Bilhan began:

"Thou knowest an aged shepherd of the name of Heman, who hath some flocks over beyond Bethlehem?"

"I have heard of him. They say he was a priest in the temple, in Nabonassar's time."

"So I have heard. He hath a nephew."

"No, a son, is it not?"

"He hath been called a son, but he is the son of Levi, Heman's brother, who died when the boy was a child."

"Ah, well, maybe it is. I never knew him."

"His name is Ariel. He and his uncle are in the city."

"Where?"

"In my house. The boy is going to Babylon, thinking to hasten the deliverance."

"Blessed is he; may his beard be long. I made that

journey, over the desert, through Palmyra, once. I would that I could make it once again. When goeth he, and how?"

"It is that which brought me hither. He goeth by camel, straight across, as soon as preparation can be made. Hast thou, among thy beasts, two dromedaries fit for such a journey?"

"Surely providence led me to condition them. I have two beauties. Strong and swift, clean limbed and with the tempers of angels. Their humps are round and full as the ripe gourd and their hoof-pads——"

"And a canopied saddle of sightly make for one of them and housings fit for a guide for the other?"

"Yea, of a sort to please a king's pet. Thou hast done well to come to me. None other in Jerusalem could have furnished these things."

"And the price of the outfit complete?"

Kallai began to haggle, as was the way of Jews. The brutes were lords of their kind. No others, of all his rearing, were so well set up or so lovably behaved. Moreover, he hinted at other prospective purchasers. Pressed for answer, he finally named a sum which Bilhan considered fair. He dropped his voice a little lower:

"Good. To-morrow I bring a purchaser who will pay exactly twice this sum. The excess is mine. A sale is its own reward."

The mild eyes of the other narrowed:

"No, a third of the excess—not a shekel more."

"A third? Think, man, of thy profit at the old price."

"It is very little; hardly anything; really nothing at all. I made the price low, knowing the holy purpose of the journey. Still, if the sum seem small, we will divide the excess into halves. One shall be thine."

"I will lead the customers to another market." Bilhan arose as if to leave.

"Wait; I will keep one-third of the excess only. I would not so much to another but thou hast befriended me."

"Done. A word more; these beasts, are they perfect? I will have no man-killers or sore-footed things put off upon these customers. They are not judges."

"They are, as I tell thee, faultless. Thy friends, paying the price thereof, shall have the best."

"So be it. I will bring them here to-morrow, between the second and the third hour after sunrise."

"This Heman, is he so rich that he careth not if he payeth double?" Kallai asked.

"He hath some wealth; how much I know not."

"As it cometh to mind, there is a legend that only a part of the temple treasure was carried away when the Chaldees sacked it, and that the rest lieth hidden somewhere on the hill. Could it be that this old man—thou saidst he was once a priest, didst not?"

"Nay; thou saidst it; I have heard it repeated. Where is the city without its tales of hidden treasure?"

"Yes, I know, but hearken; what is the appearance of this man Heman?"

"He is old and tall," Bilhan rejoined curtly, anxious to terminate this trespass upon the subject of the treasure.

"The lad Zeth, who cometh here to hear my Nana sing, was saying, this very evening, that, since midday, while he was grazing his goats over beyond the Gate of Benjamin, he saw an old man, dressed like a priest, walking about on the hilltop. Two others waited, he said, and the three went away together. He was too far away to hear their speech."

"More probably it was some poor woman who went up there to weep."

"No, no, he said the man was old, and had a long beard, and wore the miter and the gown."

"It is easy for a youth to be mistaken, Kallai, especially when his vision is befogged by love. Before I go, canst tell me of some one, clever at the loom, who might supply this Ariel with garments fit for Babylonian eyes?"

"I can, in truth. A woman of Israel, whose weaving is beautiful, like her virtue. Basmath is her name and she dwelleth near the Old Gate, in a little house with a grape-vine over the door. She is the mother of Zeth. He is a wise youth, Bilhan, and doth it not seem strange that a man in priestly raiment was up there? Zeth spake of a heap of stones at the east side——"

Bilhan, seeming not to hear the beginning of this return to the unwelcome subject, repeated the engagement of the morrow and took his way.



Then Kallai called in his daughter to break to her the good tidings of the sale, and of the brave young shepherd who was to start to the East to bring the Jews home; also of how this youth, and his uncle, might be they whom Zeth saw. She listened, full of frank delight, and asked a hundred questions about the strangers, questions which her father could by no means answer. When she went to her rest that night it was with her maiden mind fuller of thoughts of the son of Levi than it ever had been of the goatherd, or of any other man.

As Bilhan passed out of the house Zeth, who had lain hidden in the shadows close beside the door, where he had contrived to hear a part of the dialogue, crept after him. First he turned in the direction of the youth's own house, then wheeled and set out westward. Altering this intention also, he proceeded to his own place. The goatherd followed unseen, until he saw the other go in.

This part of the city was less familiar to Zeth than almost any other, for in it lived the better, or, to be more accurate, the less wretched class. He made a circuit of the house, then groped for a distance along the narrow street, or lane, by which the three had reached the hill that afternoon. Having satisfied some curiosity of his own, the weaver's son went home, through streets that were dark, except for a thin moon, and empty except for cats, the lean and half wild scavengers of the city, which slunk from shadow to shadow ahead of him or yowled starvation as he

passed. He entered his mother's house and lay down on his pallet, not to sleep, but to gloat in a new-born vision of sudden riches and triumphant love.

Next morning he was awake before the stars had sunk. Day was in the breaking when he climbed the west slope of Moriah and sought the stone heap on the farther side. Trembling and furtive, he made his way around and around the heap, going on all fours, scrutinizing every niche in the broken blocks and columns. Time after time he arose and looked around, with the world-old air of a man who is about an evil deed. As often, seeing no living thing, he bent to his task again. Finding nothing, and being unable even to see that a single stone had been disturbed, he began to lift them up, one at a time, and to replace them, carefully, the moment he saw the solid earth beneath them. Disappointment took hold of him as the sun moved higher and the heat increased. Mopping his streaming face on the skirt of his grimy gown, he left the pile and made a like inspection of another heap, close by the larger one. Then he searched along the old foundation line on three sides, and had returned to assail the original task when his purpose was changed, in a manner the least expected.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SONG OF SONGS

“**T**HE price thou namest is too much, surely,” said Heman, while he, with Ariel and Bilhan, stood in the khan yard. Two dromedaries of magnificent build had been led up and down in view of the group and caused to kneel repeatedly, while Kallai praised their points with genuine Israelitish zeal.

“Too much! These royal ones? I would not sell them at all except to one of the pure blood. The sign of a good heart sitteth in the face of this youth. As to the price, behold what beasts they are! In the markets of Sidon, or Beersheba or Palmyra, the match for one of them would cost thee all I ask for both.”

The bargain was made, at last, and out of a leathern wallet the old man told the sum into the khankeeper’s hand. It was further arranged that beasts and trappings were to be held in constant readiness for the journey. Then a rare thing occurred. In a flash of conscience, Kallai took from the sum he had received one-third part, and passed it back to the astonished Heman:

“Good friend, I am poor, but the time for profit is another time. I give it back to thee, and do thou remember the deed when thou art on thy knees.”

The outraged Bilhan, being quite unable to check this madness, cursed in two languages, behind his

teeth, and masked his disappointment under a look of pious calm.

Heman's face became all admiration. "Worthy thou art, good keeper. But what thou hast is thine. The Lord is not poor, though some of His children are."

The oddity of this transaction perturbed the watching Bilhan, who was therefore doubly glad of the rapid change of subject which succeeded it. Ariel hardly knew what the keeper did, for he was listening to the sound of a harp inside the house. Heman, noting his abstraction, sternly asked the keeper who it was that thus made merry in the ashes of the holy city.

"Only my daughter, good friend, my little Nana, the light of my life and the image of Rachel who is gone. The child sings only because her heart is young and glad. Come out, my Rose, come out that my friends may see thee."

Nana had seen them when they came. She had watched them examine the camels, following Ariel's every movement with that fluttering fascination which is not love, but often is love's prophet, or handmaiden, and for which no adequate name exists. Then she had taken her harp and begun the most appealing strain she knew. Hoping, and dimly knowing by some intuition, that Ariel would hear her, and that she would speak to him, she still was more than half afraid as she went forth at her father's call. She knelt, with folded arms, and bowed her head in the salute then common in the East, and arising, looked neither at

Heman nor Bilhan, nor yet at her father, but up under long eyelashes at the son of Levi. He, returning the look, was aware of such a pounding of his heart as seemed about to burst him. A fiery blush crept into his face. He saw what he had never seen before; a lightly draped and softly curving figure, perhaps the littlest little below the height which perfect proportion would have stipulated. If so, the compensation of the look of woman-power in leash was absolute. Her skin was the faintest olive in tinge; a half smile hid somewhere on the full lips or in the great eyes. Above and back from the wide brow the dark hair was heaped in studied confusion.

Kallai did not see the youth; he was lost in admiration of his child; his child who, quite unguessed by him, was a child no more.

Heman, perceiving the rubicund face, saw little else for sheer wonder that one daughter of Israel could so perturb a Hebrew of the Hebrews. Bilhan alone took in the situation as it was. With a leer, he paid the daughter half a dozen turgid compliments, crammed into a sentence. She bowed, and smiled, and looked at Ariel. Slightly relieved of his first embarrassment, he stammered something in the way of salutation.

"We heard thy voice and the harp, my child, and I could not let my friends depart till they had seen my little song-bird."

"Yes, under thy tongue there are golden bells," said Bilhan. "And I see the harp is there by the door. Wilt not sing something else to us before we go?"

Music like thine becometh a sorrow only when it is stilled."

"Yes, play and sing for us again, I ask of thee," Ariel ventured.

Heman muttered something about the height of the sun, but Kallai, proud of the praise, commanded her to entertain them. She sat on the bare earth, in the shadow of the wall, and drew her fingers across the strings. Then, by chance or intent, she cast another look directly into Ariel's eyes; then the song began.

The seams in Bilhan's face deepened and lengthened. Heman shot looks from Ariel to the little musician and back again, in blank surprise, while Kallai, nodding his head to the tune, seemed lost in the rhythm. As for Ariel, he stared and stared and his wonder increased each moment, for the rich voice was pouring out a passionate oriental rhapsody, a song whereof the substance may be found in the latter half of the fifth chapter of the Canticles. When it was ended she bowed to the group and laughed a really wonderful laugh, then disappeared into the house before the nimble tongue of Bilhan could let loose the flattery it had shaped.

"She is a child, a little child," her father murmured, looking fondly after her. "She hath learned that song from hearing old Saul, the mad smith, sing it, as he pounds cold iron at his forge across the square. She knoweth not what it suggesteth to the grown mind. She is that innocent, my little Rose!"

"The wisdom of Solomon, my worthy friend, is

not the plaything for a maiden, be she ever so fair. I do admonish thee, let the girl sing the joyful psalms, if sing she must in this sepulcher. They belong to youth and lightness of heart. But Solomon's song—its holy symbolism goeth deeper than a maid's mind should try to follow. If ever thy daughter sing for me again, let the song be other than Solomon's." Being delivered of this, the old man's mouth became a hard straight line beneath its mantling beard.

The mild Kallai began to offer explanations. Heman, already impatient of the delay, cut short his stammerings and inquired the way to the house of the weaver Basmath. Ariel fell a pace or two behind the others as they left the yard, and looked back, wistfully. He saw a sweet young face, framed for a moment in a narrow window. As he went on there was a new resilience in his steps, and something near to exultation in his mind.

The widow Basmath was subdued in manner and sad of countenance. Being told the wants of the strangers, she brought out a little assortment of fabrics, and displayed them, one at a time, without apparent interest. Heman, who promptly decided, in his own mind, what should do for his nephew, found his choice of two plain yellowish weaves unchangeably distasteful to the youth himself. He would have purple, worked with red thread and hung with tassels. And it was he, at last, who told the widow what he wanted. As the order finally stood, it was for some of the gayest raiment of the age. The uncle fell back upon certain

pithy sayings of Solomon, but let young vanity have its will.

At the widow's door the party divided, Heman to return to Bilhan's house, and the boy and Bilhan, by Bilhan's arrangement, to go out into the city to look for a guide. This plan gave opportunity for resumption of their conversation in the court the day before.

"As I told thee, lad, Babylon is not Jerusalem. The Jews are unlike any thou seest here. The change appears the moment thou art among them. They might be of another race. And Daniel and his followers are more heard of in Judea in a day than they are in Babylon in a season. The return will come about, in time, but mark this: it will be God's business when it does. Go thou to the East, as thou hast planned, but remember; expect no large or sudden harvest of thy sowing."

"Believest thou that I can not be of use to the Cause?" asked Ariel, halting and putting the question with sharp directness.

"Nay, I would not say so much; how should I know? Perhaps thou canst. It is this that I mean: thou art full of youth and good to look at—hang not thy head at the truth—. Thou mayest come into the presence of powerful men, and women. If thou goest so far, be not so foolish as to preach pulse as a diet and celibacy as a virtue. Eat with them, drink with them, do as they do, in moderation, and watch thy chance."

"Make myself like them?" He struck a declam-



atory pose. "I go not to fall asleep in sin. I go to awaken. I will labor for the deliverance, day and night, with all the power that is in me. If I fail, God's will be done."

"So be it. Only remember that I have advised. And heed thou this last, if thou heedst nothing else. Be thou discreet regarding women. Remember, I say discreet."

"Women! What are they to me!"

"What they are to every he-man born of one; subtle creatures in whom is the warmth of heaven; hell also."

"Bilhan, why talkest thou so much of women? What manner of man is he that a woman can swerve from a settled purpose? Be assured, I fear them not."

Bilhan looked into the bright face and his own puckered with wisdom: "The man that a woman can swerve, boy, is sometimes young, frequently old, and always sure that he is not in danger, just as thou art."

The youth laughed. "Have I learned the lessons of Samson and Delilah for nothing? Or the story of our Solomon and his foreign wives? I tell thee I am not afraid of a woman."

"Ah, though she were winsome, like Kallai's Rose?" Bilhan asked it with a leering look.

The blood flooded into Ariel's face and he answered, darkly: "Why sayest that? She seemeth a happy maiden, such as I would love to have for a sister, but——"

"Yea, and wouldst lose thy speech, and stand like

an owl at noon if thy sister spoke to thee or looked at thee, or sang the Song of Songs in thy hearing? Blush! Yea, turn away thy face, it is the color of fresh meat. I watched thee in the khan yard, and I am old, and I know. Hearken, I blame thee not, nor her. But she did not sing to Heman, nor to her sire, nor yet to me. Young man, the Rose of Jerusalem sang for thee alone. There, there, I meant not to say that I saw it. But remember, man should not belittle the power of women. It is the way of fools. Now here is the house of Hiram. If we can hire and hold him, which I gravely doubt, he will be a guide among ten thousand. I will speak with him privily, and call thee into our conference later. I knew his father."

While he made known this excellent plan he knocked on the door of a miserable, mud-walled shed, abutting upon a lane the extraordinary filthiness of which attested a population thicker than that of any part of the city Ariel had seen. The greasy face of a child appeared at a broad crack running down beside the door. Bilhan called through the aperture to ask if the owner were at home. The face withdrew and directly the door was opened by a portly little man, clad in a single shirt-like garment. Taking him aside, Bilhan engaged him, readily enough, for he had made the journey once or twice and was glad, for divers reasons, of the chance of making it again. Nor was it omitted that Bilhan should derive a profit from the arrangement. These preliminaries adjusted, Ariel was called into the parley, in which he bore himself with

such tact as convinced him that his own diplomacy had saved the case.

Heman had not been idle during these negotiations. Reaching Bilhan's house, he took the casket from hiding and selected from it a dozen stones of medium size and quality. These he transferred to his wallet. Donning his priestly garb he carried the remainder of the treasure to the hill.

It was when Zeth's hope was at lowest ebb that he saw the faded miter rising over the edge of the elevation. He darted into a little thicket of branching myrtles, close to the large heap, and watched the apparition come fully into view. His heart went into his throat for joy, for he knew the figure to be the same that he had seen before. Well hidden as he was, he crouched lower in the growth as the old man, having bared his feet, came picking his way straight toward the clump, clasping his bundle to his bosom. So straight came he that the youth was chilled with a sudden fear that he was caught. Thereupon he lay down on his belly and shut his eyes, expecting to feel a hand at the scruff of his neck. He heard the thud of the naked feet, close to his ears, and the rustle of the garments. Taking courage he peeped out, only to see the back of the priest, who had knelt beside the stones, and now stood up again with his hands empty. Glancing about, he seemed to be studying the soil which Zeth had worked so thoroughly, but if any suspicion came to his mind it did not detain him. He

departed, and slipped on his sandals, where he had put them off, and descended the embankment, out of sight.

The young man waited many minutes, which seemed many more than they were, for he feared a sudden return. When he did quit cover he moved with caution befitting his business there. Shunning the pile, he skirted the south side to a point commanding a view of the path. Assured that he was now alone, he made hungry haste to his labor.

Inspired by the contract for the garments, Basmath was moved to an extraordinary warmth of kindness toward all the world. Having selected and laid aside those weaves from which the raiment was to be made, she prepared a midday meal of more abundant fare than her poverty allowed as custom. When it was ready she sat by the door, awaiting the son. A knot of children, at play with a dead hawk found in an alley, stared when they heard her singing a song. The widow Basmath seldom sang.

The shadows of the square roof crept away from the westward threshold and lengthened eastward. It was long after midday and the boy came not. The thing was without an equal in his life. A dozen times she walked to the head of the lane in which she lived and looked each way. She asked two little boys, who passed with a fig basket between them. They had been over east of the city, but could give no news of Zeth. She halted an aged man, who went slowly along with a staff, as if he were lost, and asked if he had seen her

son. He answered that, by the grace of God he did not think so, for he had been blind as a worm for two decades.

The day was nearly spent when Zeth appeared. His hands were blistered and bleeding; his clothing was torn and stained with earth and his face was covered with sweat and soiled with tears. He emptied a half filled water-skin at a draught and devoured, with an eagle's appetite, the food his mother set before him, giving nothing but grunts in reply to her anxious questions. Thinking him ill she forebore to vex him, and prepared his pallet with more than wonted care.

Her apprehension of illness deepened soon after he fell asleep, for he began to mutter, and to clutch and grasp, as if in the midst of a heavy task.

"It is here; I know it is; I saw him, here, right here!"

She laid a cool hand over his brow and the raving hushed. Once, farther in the night, she heard him scream, with a sob:

"There is nothing here; I have turned them all. He was not a man; he was the devil!"

## CHAPTER VI

### OLD JEWISH FIRES

**F**ROM the time of his covenant to serve as Ariel's companion through the wilderness, Hiram was a daily caller at Kallai's house. The little man criticized the camels from humps to hoof-pads, saddles and all, with the air of one who knew, yet when the outraged keeper asked him to name some actual fault, in beasts or trappings, he gave out nothing but sage negative movements of his own small head. Before two days were gone, however, mutual advances of confidence led them to tell, each to the other, of the part each had observed Bilhan to play in the plans for the journey. The source of wealth, moreover, which could do such things as Heman was doing, led to a deal of gossip between them. Bits of it reached the ears of Nana, as bits of gossip will, and filled her, as such bits invariably do, with surmises which were worse than the truth. From the hour when she first caught Ariel's name, muttered between them as they stood outside her window, she eavesdropped shamelessly and with effect. Yet all she gained was the impression that some real danger overhung the son of Levi. She divined that Bilhan was at the root of it, and that her father and Hiram somehow were being drawn into its execution. All of this she hid, instinctively.

Kallai noted an unaccustomed stillness in the girl

and remarked that the harp lay idle most of the time. He questioned her, without result. Her happiness was close to his heart, and with parental anxiety he spoke of her to Hiram, while the two were sitting in the shadiest corner of the yard, arms folded about their knees. Nana heard her own name spoken and stole to the window nearest them and laid a hopeful ear to a fortunate crevice below the sill.

"I know not why my jewel is so silent," Kallai was saying. "Some evil charm is upon her. Music is gone from her lips and the harp feels not her fingers any more. As Jehovah liveth, she is as still as a brooding wren. I understand it not, but I wish my Rose were as she used to be."

"Art sure it is not the fever? Sometimes it cometh so."

"No, she is not sick. It is rather as if she were sad. Last night, after she was asleep, I heard her sob."

Hiram wrinkled his mouth and fixed the speaker with a knowing gaze. "My friend, art thou man or ox, that thou canst not guess what aileth a pretty maiden when she is sad all day and weeps upon her pillow by night?"

"What, then, what is it?"

"Love, oh, Kallai; that first, wondrous love," replied Hiram.

Nana felt a tremor run along every nerve. Then came the impulse to fly to her own little room and lie down on her bed and weep.

“Love! She, my little child, my Rose, in love! With whom? It can not be!”

“It can not be, it can not be! Thus the ox would answer, if his tongue were thinner. I tell thee it is so. Am I the father of four daughters, wed and gone to themselves, and still a stranger to maidens’ whims!” And Hiram stiffened his neck and rolled his eyes expressively. Taking advantage of Kallai’s speechlessness he pattered on:

“With whom the girl is in love is another question. Some young grub about the city probably, or it may be some old he-goat with a beard as long as both his feet. Love is half blind, Kallai, which is worse than wholly so. It might be the very youth who is to follow me east on the camel yonder. He is a handsome stripling. Angels could not blame her if it were. Yet that would be a pity, too. Two mornings hence and we leave. The old man told me so this morn, if he change not his mind. He thinks for the youth in everything—hast noticed it, Kallai? A likely youth, but, if ever he gets to Babylon—I say it only to thee—if ever he gets to Babylon he will forget Judea, kin, religion and everything west of the sand, all in two seasons. I know that place.”

Nana recoiled from the window as though struck.

“Why?” queried Kallai.

“Why? Wine that is thick and red and women that wink and smile. And a boy is a boy, my Kallai. Mark it; this one is leaving Jerusalem forever.”

Trembling, tingling with a charge of emotions



never known to her before, the Jewess waited to hear no more, but ran to her own chamber, where she shut herself up for an hour, with a cruelly bitter ache in her heart. Alternating moods of unreasoning anger against the blethering guide and of pity for her own large wretchedness swept her soul as a hand sweeps a harp. What cared she for this son of Levi? This she asked herself, but she would not hear the answer of her heart. Why did he come to Jerusalem to make her suffer? And why, again, was he so different from any other shepherd boy? From Zeth, for instance? This thought brought to her the realization that, for some days, Zeth had not appeared at the khan at all. His absence had been mildly grateful.

As if her thought had broken a spell, her father, at that moment, called through the door, saying that Zeth was in the yard, and would she not come with her harp and entertain him? She went, and there was a lump in her throat and tears were perilously near to her eyelids.

Kallai, mindful of Hiram's explanation of the girl's late silence, suddenly remembered that Zeth had been absent of recent afternoons. Thereupon, believing that he saw a bright light shed upon mystery, he lifted up his heart in thanks. No sooner had Nana begun to play than he left the place and remained away till evening.

The first brief song was hardly ended when the weaver's son, by rambling hints and uncouth gestures,

made known to the girl that he held a weighty secret. Pressed by a question or two, he vouchsafed the news that it had to do with Ariel and his uncle.

Nana leaned the harp against the wall and sat close by his side. The clumsy lad, overwhelmed by the favor, began to stammer and choke like a very fool.

"Knowest thou, Zeth," she said in his ear, "I have wondered so much about this old man, Heman, and his nephew—Ariel is his name, is it not? Yes, Ariel—I have wondered who they are and what they are about. I knew there was none other in all Jerusalem so clever as thou art to find out a secret. I would have asked thee before"—she touched the thick forearm—"but thou hast not been to see us. What kept thee away? Now tell me all about them."

His head swam and his voice shook as he began. Growing a little more calm, he bent over the listener and poured out his story with all the tensivity of greed. He told it all; of the sight of the priest on the hill; the eavesdropping by the door; his search and his disappointment.

"But it is there," he cried, "I know it is; enrichment for a thousand men. I am going again, and I shall find it. Then I will buy a house in Damascus, with a fountain in the court"—he slipped an arm about her—"and we will quit this place and dwell there all our lives."

She shrank, imperceptibly, as she asked:

"This Bilhan, who was here that night, what sort of

house is his? I seem to have seen it, one day, when my father took me out through the Gate of Benjamin to gather figs."

Zeth described the place, in wearisome particulars.

"And the shepherd and the youth are there, thou sayest."

"Yes, but they leave the second day after this, or the young one does. The priest will go back to the hills. Then I can work. Then I can find the casket——"

"And then it will be time to think of what to do with it. Now go thou home and bide thy time."

He tried to tighten the clasp of his arm around her. The tiger, which, however overruled, is aroused in the best as in the worst of Eve's daughters by the caress of a man she does not love, burst out:

"Go, leave me. Seest thou not I do not want thee? Let loose, thou beast!" She sprang up and away.

His heavy jaw fell and he turned, confounded. Plodding homeward, smarting under the first rebuff he had received at a woman's hands, he planned, in the manner of youth first stung by jealousy. And this was his plan: to find the basin, build a glorious house, buy trains of beautiful slaves, and thereby fill the maiden's heart with remorse more terrible than fire.

Kallai's wish for the return of his daughter's cheerfulness seemed to have been fulfilled that evening, for when he returned to the house he found her singing, as she moved about the old khan kitchen. After darkness came he was rejoiced when she took up the harp and sang psalm after psalm, selecting those which he

particularly loved. Like a knowing parent, he made no comment on the changed mood, but went early to bed, profoundly thankful.

A sort of alley ran along one side of the building. Into it, from the girl's room, looked one narrow window, open by day, but made secure at night by a wooden frame that swung inward and was held by a nail to a staple in the wall. Half an hour after the sire lay down, this framework was moved out of its place. Then a shawl was thrown over the window-sill and Nana slipped out, feet foremost, glanced fearfully around her, drew the shawl hood-wise over her head and hurried away.

She had made no more than half her way to Bilhan's house when a thick dark figure came from an intersecting street and began to dog her steps. Unaware of this, she reached the door of the house and knocked, so timidly that the pounding of her heart seemed louder. Yet the knock was heard, and Bilhan, who was telling Heman and Ariel how, in Babylon, the upper classes slept by day and lived their lives in the matchless nights, carried a candle through the passage and cautiously opened the door. He saw a figure, muffled beyond recognition.

"Peace to thee, but who art thou?"

"I am a friend and I seek thy guests, Heman and Ariel, his nephew."

"What for?"

"That I will tell to them. My mission is righteous."

"Woman—the voice telleth me thy sex—whatever

thy business is, it must await the morning. This is no time for thee to see these men."

"But I must see them, and I can not come again."

"Then leave a message, that they may come to thee. Gods, is Jerusalem following in the footsteps of Babylon that women seek men in their homes!" Thus muttering, he was about to close the door when Nana, clasping his sleeve to detain him, slipped the shawl from her face. He exclaimed in astonishment.

"Please, I must see them, now."

"Nothing is wrong with the beasts, I hope!"

"No, it is not the beasts. My coming is secret. I am not ashamed that I came—but let me speak to them; I pray it. The fourth of an hour will be enough."

"How, if I let thee speak only to the younger one, in here alone, would it answer, eh?" Bilhan's grin almost outdid the darkness.

A moment divided the question from the answer: "Yes, if it please thee better, send him."

"Come into the passage and stand here, there, at the end. I will send him out. Girl, thou art sweet; I say it frankly. Ah, youth, youth! I envy him; but I was young in my time. I have not the heart to make him wait, or thee."

To this, spoken into her ear in the lightest of whispers, Nana answered nothing.

"Son of Levi, we will excuse thee for a time. At the end of the passage a young friend of thine and of mine, who will not enter, is waiting to greet thee. Go

out, and see how entertaining thou canst be, while I sit here and speak to Heman of the stars that shine on Babylon."

"Who is the youth who refuses to enter?" Heman demanded, with a note of suspicion.

"Seen from the summit of the gardens, they look like new lamps, hung just out of reach," Ariel heard Bilhan saying. He went down the passage toward the door, his hands outstretched. It was very dark, as Bilhan intended it to be. His breast encountered a form which his arms had missed, and he heard a tremulous whisper:

"Ariel, Son of Levi."

"Yes, it is I, and this—ah, Nana, thou!" He was thrilled at the touch of her. Even his whisper choked in his throat with excitement.

"Listen, there is danger, danger to thee and to the Cause. The place where the jewels are hidden has been found out."

He tightened his arms about her sides.

"The weaver's son, Zeth, watched from the thicket and saw them put away. And Hiram and Bilhan are plotting, even now. I made Zeth tell me."

"Bilhan? Surely not——"

"He is the leader."

Ariel thought a moment. She felt the heave of his breast:

"What is it they plan; my death?"

"How can I know"—she clung to his arm—"but, for the love of our God, risk not thyself with them.

Go away slyly; never let them know thy fears. They would know that I had told."

His eyes, adjusted to the gloom, could barely see the upturned face. "And what would they do to thee, little Rose?"

"I can not know, but"—she drew three breaths before she concluded—"thou wilt not tell?"

"Never, but Bilhan saw and knew thee, did he not?"

"Bilhan thinketh that I came to—he knoweth not what; he can not understand. But thou, oh, tell me thou dost understand me!"

"Understand!" His arms became iron and his whisper was strong—"Let him who misunderstands thee keep his misunderstanding forever behind his mouth, or by the great God I will—" He stayed his tongue upon the very brink of a bloody threat. "Little Rose, mine uncle will reward thee, and the hiding-place of the treasure is safe. But I will not creep out of Jerusalem like a thief. I am forewarned. I would be ashamed to look into thy face again, if I feared these petty fools. Daughter of Kallai, I am a Hebrew man!"

There was a step toward the far end of the passage. Before he could detain her the adorable messenger slipped from his half embrace and was gone.

As she passed into the main street the same figure that had followed her as she came emerged from a recess between two buildings and moved stealthily after her. In this position they entered a part of the city which was more utterly deserted than that which lay behind them. The man glanced about him, then,

moving forward, catlike in softness and swiftness, he began to diminish the distance between them. Light as his footfalls were, she heard them, and cast back a terrified glance. The man was less than twenty paces away. She did not scream; she began to run. An ugly laugh came from his lips as he overtook her—no difficult feat for him—clutched her arms from behind and thrust her down upon her knees. Then she did scream, but once only, for a thick scarf, folded double, was drawn over her mouth and made fast by a swift knot at the back of the head. In a twinkling her wrists were lashed immovably behind her back, with the long ends of the bandage.

There was many a mart and many a palace, east and west, to which the trafficker in human beauty, howsoever got, could take his wares and be assured of welcome.

The man straightened from his bending posture when he had secured the gag by another bandage, and blew out a loud breath as he passed a sleeve across his dripping brow. The action was incomplete when a pair of hands laid hold of the bull throat, with a grip that made the eyes protrude. The kidnaper reached toward his belt. That instant his skull was driven sideways against a jutting stone in the nearest wall. His hand fell open and quivered. Four times that conical head was made to strike, like a swung hammer. When the grip was loosened the senseless bulk toppled and lay on its back, the eyes staring white. Then the son of **Levi**, towering a moment above the helpless shape,



caught up a stone fragment, heavy and rough, which lay unfortunately near, lifted it high and sent it crushing against that blank and brutal face.

The fierce old heroes of the Books of Kings begat sons in the likeness of themselves.

## CHAPTER VII

### INTO THE EAST

“**W**HERE hast thou been?” Heman demanded, advancing toward the door as Ariel entered.

“Down in the city.”

“With whom, and for what purpose? Speak quickly!”

Bilhan chuckled to himself and drew near, to hear the end of the mischief which he himself had begun.

“I am weary now. Come to our chamber and I will tell thee.”

“No, as Jehovah liveth, I will not be put off. Speak now! Say have I brought thee up, and kept thee away from the very appearance of sin, all for one holy work, that thou shouldst brush my teachings all aside, on the very day of thy consecration, and go skulking away with a shameless woman? Speak!”

“Who called her that?”

“I did. None other would steal here, by night, to see thee, a stranger. The blame is divided. Our host here beareth a part; he knoweth it well.”

Bilhan’s chuckle grew audible. The son of Levi drew himself up imperiously:

“Sirs, one of ye seems sure that I have sinned grievously; the other, by the sound, is much amused. What I have done is done. I am going in yonder. Uncle, if thou carest to hear an explanation, follow me

thither. I will make none here." So saying, he brushed past them and strode to the little room which he and Heman had occupied ever since their coming. The old man followed him. Bilhan, full of that strange delight which some men take in the curable agonies of others, stood watching:

"Gods," he chuckled, "how love galleth the righteous. Will a youth go after a maiden? Will the needle fly to the lodestone? Will the lily turn to the sun?"

The instant uncle and nephew were alone the self-assurable of the latter fell away like a garment. Kneeling, he clasped the old knees, begged forgiveness if he had disobeyed, then, point by point, omitting nothing, he told of the visit and its meaning; also of how, when the messenger was gone, he remembered that danger lay in the way, and followed her. Heman's eyes glowed as he listened, and flashed at the story of the combat, but when it came to the stone fragment and the white face he twisted his beard and began to pace the floor.

"Thou sayest he stirred not?"

"No. It was as if the stone had struck a melon. I was strong when I hurled it down. I loosed the girl's hands and took the gag out of her mouth. Then I peered into his face again. He breathed a little, but he never moved."

"Didst leave him lying?"

"I dragged him into a sitting posture against the wall, but he pitched forward again. Then I left him."

Heman, pacing up and down the room, stopped short: "And the maiden; what of her?"

The young head went up: "Now for thy wrath: Ever since my childhood thou hast taught me to shun the face of a woman. I disobeyed to-night. I threw my mantle about her. I went with her to her father's house. I lifted her in at the window by which she came out, to warn us, and——"

The old man bored him with his eyes as he hissed: "Yea, tell it all."

"I will; fear not. She bent her face out over the sill to thank me, and I lifted my face to hers. I kissed her lips, if thou wouldst know it! Moreover"—his head was thrown back and his voice was dangerously loud—"I would kiss her again. Solomon was human: am I divine?"

The uncle, clawing his beard and still pacing the floor, scowled out from under fiercely bristling brows, but he was silenced for the time. There was even something resembling pride in the sparkle of his eyes.

"I came back past the place," Ariel went on more quietly, "but the man was lying as I had left him."

"O Father in Heaven, and see that stain on thy sleeve! I pray that Bilhan overlooked it. Ariel, thou hast killed a man!"

Lashed by this realization, the nephew also began to pace the floor. "What shall we do, what is there for me to do!" came from his lips, distorted like the lips of a crying child.

"Hush; what did I tell thee of the world? But think, too, of the Cause. What must be done is plain. Out of Jerusalem thou shalt go, so quickly that the stink of this thing shall not overtake thee. When thou art well upon thy way"—he raised his doubled fists and smote the air—"I will deal with these traitors, alone."

Together they made their plan, and they put it to action with so much despatch that Nana, half dead with terror from her adventure, was still awake, though burrowed down in her rude bed, when all her fears were startled afresh by a vigorous pounding on the khan door.

She heard her father, aroused from his sleep, ask who was there. Then he opened the door; hurrying feet came into the house and a babel of excited talk began, in which her father's tones and those of Ariel and of Heman were all distinguishable. Unable to hear what they said, but being sure from the first that her own rank indiscretion would be made known to her father, she lay still, straining her ears. Sometimes the voices seemed angry; again they sank so low that she lost them altogether. It was a vast relief when, after what seemed an hour of torturous waiting, she heard the door of the intervening chamber open, and the sound of approaching footsteps.

"Nana, my child, Nana!"

She did not answer and Kallai rapped loudly on the casing of the door. "Nana, my child, awaken!"

"What is it?" she muttered, simulating the speech of one just awakened.

"Get up and dress thyself quickly and come. There is much to be done, at once."

The words were altogether kindly. Wholly perplexed, she hurried into her outer clothing and arranged her hair, and, with a brave effort to check the tumult of her heart, went out to face, she knew not what.

The men were close together in the center of the farther room, talking earnestly. Ariel was the first to see her. Intelligence went forth upon that look. The Rose of Jerusalem read it, and knew that all was well. Heman spoke, with measured emphasis:

"Child, it hath come to us, by the Lord's goodness and that of His servants, that wicked men are planning to hinder us. Some that we trusted are false. The guide, who was to go with this youth, is one of them. We know, too, that thy father is a righteous man. He hath been across the desert once; he knoweth the way. Now he, none other, is to be the companion of Ariel, on his journey. He will tell thee what to do, Daughter of Judah, and be thou swift to obey him. The night hath wings."

"Yes, I am to be the guide," her father repeated. "Within the hour we start. Make up my other clothing into a bundle and put thy heaviest shawl into it. The desert nights are cold."

"Oh, father, shall I be left alone?"

He clasped her with impulsive tenderness: "Nay, far from it. The good Heman will abide here with thee till I come again."

"Wilt be my child, my daughter, for the time?" the old man asked, with a benign smile. "I promise that thy father, when he cometh home, shall bring thee some pretty trinket from Tadmor, and a ribbon or two from Babylon itself, to remember the journey by. Now haste thee; the time is all too short before us."

Then the old khan was a scene of stirring about and of hurrying to and fro, such as it had not known since the glory of Jerusalem departed. Provisions, some of them held in waiting for days past, were hastily packed in the cavernous saddle hampers. Bottles of water and of wine were filled and slung upon the beasts, which had been aroused from their rest and fed, groomed, saddled and loaded while they knelt, just out from the door. Even the widow Basmath was awakened, by Heman himself, to deliver over the garments, which, by excellent fortune, she had finished that afternoon. She handed out the bundle, received the payment and straightway thrust fast and bolted the door, believing the customer had lost his mind.

While these preparations went on, each of the four was everywhere. Out in the yard, not far from the camels, the son of Levi, in a rapturous moment, came face to face with Nana, who was bearing a water-skin. "Give it to me," he whispered, and took the burden from her arms, and laid it on the ground. He put his lips close to her ear:

"The time is short before I go, little Rose, and I can not thank thee for all thou hast done——"

Her breast was heaving. "They said——" she faltered:

"What is it. Tell me, Nana."

"They said thou wouldst—fall into sins in Babylon." She looked up, and there were tears in the curves of her cheeks.

"They?"

"Hiram, who was to be thy guide. I heard him tell my father. They were sitting here by the wall. I listened."

Since man first dared attempt analysis of that most wonderful emotion, it which grapples heart to heart, divinely indifferent to prudence, woman has been charged of tyranny over him who loves her. Never man lived who was not a greater tyrant when he guessed his power. Hence come the ways of wooing. Hence the son of Levi, though in a perfect ecstasy, replied:

"And wouldst care so much then, Nana, if I did fall into sin?"

Nana did not answer by the utterance of any of those clumsy sounds called words. She nodded her head, looking down. There was a little pause; then she added:

"I would care, for the great Cause. Be thou brave as thou wert brave to-night."

His ecstasy fell to ashes of a sudden. He had the feeling that a priceless something had been tossed to



him, from Heaven, suddenly, and as suddenly snatched away. Then he sank on his knee, and grappled her to his heart, and set against her lips a kiss which set the heart to hammering and turned the averted face to utter crimson. She caught her breath, as if in terror, and pressed her hands outward against his breast.

"Ho, Ariel, here," called Heman, peering from the door.

"Yes," answered he. Then, "Rose of Jerusalem, I am going to Babylon, but not to sin. I must keep pure for the task which takes me, and for more than that." His clasp of her was iron again. "Tell me—Nana, I love thy body and the soul of thee, with a love like the midday sun. Beloved, I will save myself for thee. Tell me that thou, too, carest—that when I come again, I will find thee waiting for me, as pure as thou art to-night. Wilt say it?"

"Nana, come, haste!" Kallai thrust a torch out through the doorway, and followed it himself, peering about with inquisitive innocence. He met his daughter, coming straight toward him, empty-handed. And from his right, approaching from quite another part of the yard, came Ariel, bringing the skin of water. Happy that saying that love is a worker of miracles.

In that period of exceeding darkness which preceded the dawn, there was a parting in the khan yard. Heman and Ariel embraced each other, and Kallai, with his arms about his daughter, told her in fond undertones to fear not. Ariel caught her hands in his, and a faint pressure answered that that he gave.

"Good-by, and thanks for all thou hast done, thou Rose of Jerusalem," said he.

She dropped her head: "And if thou askest my —blessing—Son of Levi, it is given thee; and good-by."

The great dun beasts, fully caparisoned, had stood as silent witnesses to the leavetakings. They were now commanded to kneel. The men mounted into their saddles; the word was given; the brutes arose and moved, their huge shapes rocking monster-like in the gloom.

"The God of our Israel keep thee," Heman cried, as the forms passed through the eastern gate of the square. A twofold blessing floated back through the hush. Already they were out of sight, headed for the ancient Prison Gate, from which the highway led to Jericho. Nana, struck with a loneliness such as she never had known before, stole up to the old man's side and, child-like, wound both arms around his sleeve. His free hand stole across and rested on her head, as he stood, still peering into the darkness.

Before the heavy-sleeping Hiram opened his eyes that morning; before the weaver's son awakened from his dreams of hidden treasures and broken hearts, and before Bilhan called in his slave, with the cup of that particular eastern wine which he always took before his final nap, the dromedaries passed Mount Olivet, east of the city, and swung away over the road to Jericho like two gigantic birds. Dawn met them as they flew.

Palestine, then as now, was not a lovely land, but Ariel's heart grew heavy, now that he was leaving. Poppies, and sometimes irises, bloomed by the way-side, and here and there in a bed of better soil, a white narcissus, the rose of Sharon, growing apart from any of its kind, looked up at them, wistful in its loneliness. But under this frail mask, the traveler from a richer country would have seen the countenance of Death himself. Dull gray-white limestone cropped out all around, sometimes in the stern company of boulders, often in pebbles and sand. For then, as now, the region was disputed earth, attacked upon the west side by the sea, and upon the east by the Syrian Desert, reaches of which, extending toward the Mediterranean, clutched it like the fingers of a colossal hand.

Day was fairly begun when they went through Jericho, pausing not at all, but pressing straight on toward the Jordan. The virgin air from the nearing sand became a breeze against their faces. Crossing the river, a little above its mouth in the Dead Sea, they kept their way, still eastward. The afternoon was waning when they rode through Heshbon, once the seat of power of the Moabitish and Amoritish kings. There the riders refreshed themselves and gave the dromedaries feed, but no drink, that being reserved that they might fill themselves at the last watering place before they rested. South of the Rabbath Ammon, by the upper waters of the Zerkamain, they camped, that night, on the very edge of the desert. The air was strangely cool. Foxes barked at the bold

intrusion. Once or twice the hoarse bass roar of a mountain lion startled them out of their sleep beside the dromedaries.

When the morning sun looked over the farther rim of that God-cursed land; upon its ugly tooth-like sand-hills, its forbidding ravines; its dull gray boulders jutting out of the earth, and its snake-like vapors, crawling lazily before the light, he saw two dromedaries, speeding eastward, necks outthrust, the canopies rocking ship-like as they swept along.

The son of Levi had left the land of his fathers; also a shepherd boy was on his way to the **greatest** city of the heathen world.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GATE OF LIONS

**S**EARCHING the map of Asia to discover the boundaries of the Euphrates and Tigris Valley, one finds only a broad and general definition of its western limit. There it seems to blend with the desert, losing itself by degrees too fine for indication on the colored page.

In modern times the character of these contiguous regions justifies this treatment by topographers. When tourists, crossing the barren sand-waste eastward, reach the border of the ancient Land of Ur, they begin to see scattering shrubs, low, dwarfish and blasted by the sun, and here and there small clumps of a coarse dry grass which unaccountably draws its substance from the gray-brown soil. Proceeding, they observe a gradual thickening of these cheerless growths and begin to discern, in the distance, dots and lines of yellowish green, which seem the heralds of happier prospects. But a closer view dispels the hope; they are only fringes of reeds that half conceal foul shallow ponds, and harbor the blunt-tailed serpent and the solitary crane. Where the ponds are larger, clumps of palms may be found. Sometimes a cluster of seedling apple trees, a row of mulberries, leaning over a half effaced canal, or a patch of wild wheat, near the water, sug-

gests what once was here, and might be here again. Nearer the river the broad dead level of the plain is broken by low and curious hills, which, seen from a distance, seem like monsters of the place, rearing up to look about them. Out of them the archeologists are bringing, piecemeal, the grim story of an age which left no monuments but these. There the wild ass roams and the gray jackal shows his teeth to the moon. No lordly city rises there; no Magian priest sits down on his temple terrace to be taught of the stars, and no puissant king rides forth behind his stallions to the lion hunt. For on that land there is a curse. Ages have not removed it; neither shall it be removed before its time.

In the days of the Last Captivity the curse was yet to fall.

Lying west of the river, and sharply distinguished from the territory surrounding it, there was a tract of solid wilderness, about ten royal stadia in its greatest length. Its shape was that of a right angle triangle, with the base to the south. All around it ran a stout stockade of living trees, the spaces between the trunks planted with branching thorn and doubly reinforced by bars of timber, spiked from tree to tree. A broad canal came down from the north, parted in halves at the apex of the triangle and poured, through open ditches, along the stockade. Around the southwest corner, or that which pointed toward the desert, the west ditch curved, skirted the base and joined its mate at the southeast

corner. At the point of union a palmwood bridge lay over the stream, not merely from east to west, but also outward from a wooden gate, hung in the thickness of the stockade.

This had been the favorite hunting ground of Nebuchadnezzar—one of many of that industrious sovereign's works of which no history has a word. Inside, where lions formerly had lived and multiplied, awaiting the royal pleasure, all was now dense-grown and untended. Even the beasts had broken out, long since, and sought more natural haunts. Neither Nabonidus, the king, nor his son, Belshazzar, loved the chase.

Now, when it pleased King Nebuchadnezzar to set aside this park, he did it as he chose; and the widest end of it fell across the ancient caravan route from Babylon westward. So the caravans approaching the sacred spot bent their course like a bow and passed along the south side, bending back to the old path when they cleared the corners. Many the trader, inbound with weary beasts, from Tadmor, or from Tyre, or the cities below the Mid-world Sea, cursed the whim which made his journey a good hour longer than it need have been.

A different feeling came upon two travelers toward the city, early one afternoon, as they neared the royal obstruction.

The season was early summer—May in modern usage—and the sun was hot above that valley, so hot that the canopies over the saddles gave no adequate *protection* from its power. Kallai rode in the lead

and Ariel near him. Men and dromedaries showed the marks of travel. The last few hours of their journey, indeed, had been through pleasant country, laid out on every side with orchards and wheat-fields, pastures with flocks of cattle grazing, and groves, with rude terraced cottages of palm logs in their shade, all overrun with grape-vines. But few trees grew near enough to the trail to break the glare, and neither tourist was seasoned to the fervid temperature. When they began to skirt the old stockade they entered a grateful shade.

"This is like evening in the desert," Kallai called back, as his canopy brushed under the drooping foliage of a giant willow.

"Yes. What is this place?"

"It is the Great King's lion pen. It is shaped like a wedge. They used to chase the creatures into the corners and spear them."

"And when shall we come to the city?" Ariel asked it wearily and for the fiftieth time since morning.

"Before the sun hath set, yes, long before. We are almost there. Take another draught from the water-skin and be of good cheer. We will go slowly in the shade, and when we round the farther corner we will see a pretty sight."

The young man heard this promise without response. He rode drooping forward, too tired even to note the monstrous girth of the trees beneath whose shade they went, or to look at the tufts of young wheat, shooting wild in every favored spot on the waterside.





80 THE COURT OF BELSHAZZAR

The shade was better still as they drew near the corner. Ariel aroused himself a little as they passed the gate by which the king had gone to his sport.

As the dromedaries rounded the corner and turned on the bow of the trail the travelers looked away down a broad avenue, or rather a great vista through open fields. At the farther end there was a sight which made them bring the beasts to a halt and rub their eyes in wonder.

Stretching so far to north and south that the corners seemed hazy and mirage-like, stood the city walls. From the summit, seventy feet in air, innumerable square brick towers, like chimneys, arose still higher. Below, a row of rectangular patches in the masonry caught the sun with the sheen of gold. They were the two-leaved gates of brass. The rampart hid the most of the city, but not the whole, for near the center the upper story of the royal palace swelled into view. Beside it, in vivid contrast with the solemn coloring all around, there loomed the peak of a mighty cone of brilliant green—the top of the Hanging Gardens. Just beyond these two the Temple of Belus shot its stupendous tower above all else. Off to the south, so near as to be, in fact, a suburb of Babylon, yet enclosed in its own walls, lay Borsippa the fair, the Temple of the Seven Lights of Heaven arising high above it. Away to the north, unless the shimmering light played tricks

apple orchards, loaded with half grown fruit; thick trellises of grape-vines; flowers, red, white and yellow, heaped up like furrows of bloom on each bank of the many small canals; and far and near, above and below, in bold distinction from every other growing thing, rich clusters of lordly palms, each densely hooded with dark green leaves, all motionless.

"My God!" ejaculated the guide.

"Nana, Nana, I wish thou were beside me to see this sight," breathed Ariel.

The first night out in the desert, under the great stars, had been full of teaching to him. He was impressed that the world was a large establishment, and that one man, though he be a Hebrew of the Hebrews, could be very much alone, and very helpless, in a little part of it. This feeling grew as the distance between him and Jerusalem lengthened. Inward from the border of Ur, each stage of the journey had increased his wonder. How came it that heathens could plant such gardens and keep such herds as these? What manner of people was this? Could it be that here was a greater race than he had reckoned! His first glimpse of the Lady of Empires deepened his doubts. As they rode from the old park toward the rampart, set with its flaming gates, he was deeply silent, yet his mind was working never so busily.

Midway of this last leg of travel they crossed a broad canal, the source of a mesh of smaller ones, which left the river away above the city, curved down below it and rejoined the parent stream. It, Kallai

told him, was the rein by which the river was governed. Thanks to its ponderous sluices, the Babylonian merchant, having frequent need to cross the river in its course straight through the city, was spared the vexation of high waters. The professional fisherman moored the dragon prow of his boat to the same ring in the quay each night throughout the year.

All about the city a deep moat hugged the walls, so closely that the water lapped at the masonry. Bridges of palmwood spanned it at every gate; one hundred altogether. Yet two of them were not of wood, but of stone. They lay, one on the east side, one on the west, midway between the ends, and the gates to which they led were twice the size of any of the rest. It was toward that one on the west that the newcomers moved.

The portal had been the favorite exit of King Nebuchadnezzar when he went to hunt. It still was called the Gate of Lions, and the name accorded well with its appearance. Above and on both sides of it the Babylonian genius had redeemed the rude face from its vast dulness. Brilliant bas-reliefs of the chase, burned in colors all over the hard brick facing, gleamed almost as brightly as the gate itself.

The aperture was no more than fifteen feet in width, its height not less than thirty. The gates, hinged into the solid mass, closed together at the center of the gap and there were fastened with ponderous locks. They were framed of bars of pure brass, and the same resplendent material covered the

stretch of the wall which held the hinges. Every upright panel ended in a spike, a little below the over-spanning masonry. Except for its double size, and the unusual ornamentation about it, the Gate of Lions was like each of the other ninety and nine.

Famous all over the world, the Gates of Brass could not have held a determined army, and King Nebuchadnezzar knew it. He caused each one to be reinforced by an immensely stout rectangle of palm trunks, spiked together crosswise and held on a track. When not in use, it hung at the side of the aperture. By sliding endwise it could be closed behind the bars.

When the travelers reached the gate they found the bright valves folded out upon the walls and the palm gate rolled aside. Thinking the portal unguarded, they rode in. As they cleared the wide shadow of the arch two guards, who were sitting, one on each side, came out and crossed spears in front of Kallai's beast.

They were thick-set low-browed men, wearing short coat-like garments of light, gray woolen stuff, gathered about their waists with leathern belts. Their feet were sandaled and the wide thongs of bullhide wound about their calves to their knees. Their hair, done in tight coils at the back of their heads, was of metallic luster and blackness, suggesting old Turanian blood. Their heavy beards, eyes the least bit almond shaped, and their strong inscrutable features, testified to the Assyrian infusion. Their weapons were tall, bronze bladed spears and short curved daggers which they wore naked in their girdles.

"Hold, who are you?" they cried in Aramaic, with the same voice.

"We are two Jews, come hither to see the city," said Ariel, in the same tongue.

"A Jew, yet you speak the tongue of Babylon? How easy it is for a Jew to lie," said one.

Ariel flushed. "I am no liar, though I speak the tongue. I learned it of one who dwelt here."

"Truly? And where dwells he now?"

"In Jerusalem."

"Jerusalem! Good gods, he quitted Babylon for Jerusalem! What is his disease, or is he merely old?" The man laughed at his sally. Ariel, stung by the implication, began to answer. Kallai, though unable to understand the dialogue, guessed by its tone that it was not all amiable. Turning, he sang back to the youth to have no quarrel with the officers.

"The hills of Judea are fairer than a level country," Ariel was saying.

"Then go back, young ass, and graze among them," retorted one.

"Pass on," commanded the other. The beasts moved.

"Stay a moment," Ariel cried to Kallai. Then to the guard: "Can you direct me to the house of a certain Hebrew of the name of Daniel?" Ariel spoke with a kind of exultation. He thought to show them that they had giped at one who was near to the great.

The first guard shook his head.

"I believe you Babylonians call him by the name

of Bel-Te-Shazzar, a name not much unlike the name of your king. He was honored at court in the time of Nebuchadnezzar."

"What was his name, did you say?"

"His Hebrew name is Daniel."

"I seem to have heard it. Was it he who did miracles before the throne, and lived on pulse, and pretended to keep away from women?"

"He pretended nothing, be sure of that. Whatever he claimed, that he claimed justly. But tell me where he is."

"Gods, youngster, how should I know where an old Jew has his hole. It is long since I heard of him. I think he died."

As the dromedaries moved forward the rider under the second canopy was more than ever disposed to silence. There was resentment, against what he was not quite sure, in the bottom of his heart, and he moved his lips as he rode, as if in the height of some sharp argument.

"What were the gatekeepers saying?" Kallai asked, over his shoulder.

"Nothing. I asked where Daniel hath his home. The heathens know not anything about him."

## CHAPTER IX

### WITHIN THE WALLS

**A**ND this was Babylon, Lady of Empires, lying foursquare inside its forty miles of wall. The nucleus was the royal quarter, a mere three stadia square, in the very center, half on the east, half on the west of the Babylon River. Thousands of slaves, the captives of Nebuchadnezzar's long campaigns, had been literally worked to death to make that nucleus what it was—a pounded earthen embankment, fifteen feet above the natural level of the plain.

Surplus earth from the river's channel formed it, dragged to its place by men and women of many tribes; yea, and by children, so small that they could but patter back and forth for a few days from river to fill, with baskets of earth, then back with the baskets empty, and so on. When they stopped, from hunger or thirst or weariness, they were driven on. When the worn-out limbs collapsed beneath them—then the little bodies went, as the little strength had gone already—to hasten the rising of the great foundation.

Upon this and such as this the glory of Babylon was builded.

Standing upon the roof of his palace and looking off in any direction, the king could see the inner wall, two miles away, while almost twice as far beyond it frowned the huge main rampart, with its crest of

towers, like teeth against the sky-line. For his capital was a city within a city, both surrounded by a broad expanse of vineyards and grain-lands.

Such was the faith of the empire in the outer wall that the inner one was unprotected by gates of any kind. Even the gates that glittered in the walls which followed the river through the city were kept in place as ornaments only. A Babylonian, finding one of them closed, by day or night, would have sought the gossips of the royal square to learn the reason.

The afternoon was far advanced when the men from Jerusalem, following the avenue straight in from the Gate of Lions, neared the confines of the central city—that inside the inner wall. They were passing through a farming district which, in its whole extent, was great enough to have kept the population, not merely alive, but in a measure of luxury through an indefinite siege. Such had been the foresight of the mighty builder-kings, succeeded now by one who could appreciate their iron wisdom only with the eye.

The travelers had been surprised at the quiet of the highway which they followed to the Gate of Lions. They were more surprised at the vastness of the number of conveyances now which met or overtook them. It was the hour at which the population of the territory was leaving off its toil till another day. From every part of the great squares, little trails, through wheat-fields, palm groves, orchards, vineyards and vegetable gardens, were discharging currents of humanity into the avenue. Houses sat on either side,



and along each by-street, but they sat with wide spaces between them. The insides of the squares which they roughly surrounded were wholly given up to husbandry. Almost every building was of reddish brick, two, three or even four stories in height, floor raised above floor on pillars of undressed palm trunks. Steps united the terraces. The lowest floor, the principal abode, was fully enclosed in walls, but those above were open, like porches, except for the pillars, set in rows around them. Some of the chambers were curtained off from the view of the street by lengths of thin cloth, breaking the power of the light, but admitting the grateful air.

Ariel pressed his dromedary alongside that of his guide: "I never saw so many people in a mass; see there what a swarm! Where go they all?"

"Homeward; their day's work is done; now wines—and worse."

The throngs were mostly laborers and mostly they were turning eastward. The riders seemed to be moving in a sea of them. Features much like those of the guards at the gate predominated, but sometimes a face was smooth-shaven and sometimes the lighter caste of hair and of eyes betokened other blood. Not very tall, strongly made, eyes and hair glinting black and movements ready and decisive, they were a race indicative of force. Their feet were sometimes sandaled, oftener naked. Their garments were coat-like shirts, coming down to the mid-thigh and held at the waist with ribbon or string.

Women, more regular of features than the men, and a shade lighter in complexion, were thick in the crowd, with which they mingled freely and as a matter of course. Their dress was little more complex than the dress of the males, but more becoming, as woman's dress is apt to be. They wore loose gowns, strapped over the shoulders and falling low about them, and ending half-way between the knees and the ankle joints. About the waist a girdle, so broad that it formed a sort of corsage, was made fast to the garment behind and caught in front with a buckle of bronze or pins of shell or coral. The heavy masses of their hair spread outward and downward from red or green or yellow ribbons, clasping it at the back of the neck. The expression of their faces was more bold than curious as they looked up at the newcomers, sometimes from the very knees of the dromedaries.

Closer to the inner wall the multiplication of sights became bewildering to Ariel. Donkeys, ridden by children, or loaded with produce, in baskets, and led by negroes, or more rarely by native children, came in and glutted the east-going stream. Other donkeys, with skins of wine flung over their withers, often moving tandem fashion, were led along, a boy with a whip following perilously close to the heels of the last one. Low wooden carts, not much unlike the famed Babylonian chariots, but lighter of build and lacking ornaments, went forward, with grapes, figs, dates, cucumbers and melons heaped above the bed, an ass in the shafts and a negro driving. On every hand the talk

buzzed. And the speech was Aramaic, barbarously spoken, according to Ariel's higher culture in its use, yet retaining, even there, that softness which attested centuries upon the tongues of sensual peoples.

The dromedaries called the attention of some of the pressing crowd, but the arrival of anything, from any part of earth, was a thing too common to arrest the gaze of many.

Here and there a house, usually on a corner, was distinguished from others by a square pillar of brick, four or five feet tall, surmounted by a prodigious shallow urn, piled high with grapes. Bees droned above the fruit. To the knowing, pillar and urn were the sign of a wineshop. Wherever one of these objects stood, the crowd was thicker than elsewhere, and the proportion of women, particularly of the younger and comelier ones, was greater. Music arose within. At one place, glancing between parted curtains on the second terrace, Ariel saw three girls, in half transparent robes, surrounded by a knot of men to whom they were singing a ribald air the while they danced.

It was nearly sunset when the dromedaries reached the gate, or rather the gateway, at the inner wall. Here was a dense-packed throng, seething, hurrying, exclaiming, each trying to pass ahead of his neighbors. Cries arose, and the commotion of men, beasts and conveyances grinding in together. Awaiting their time, the strangers moved through in the solid procession. Then the reason of the haste and congestion was plain, for just inside, on either hand, sat a great

tank of running water. Shunning these, they went on, anxious to find acceptable lodgings before the darkness.

About them now were houses of another character. Built nearer together, forming almost complete enclosure of the squares and lining every lesser street, they arose four or five stories high. The travelers did not know it, but the fair fronts which they saw, relieved by balconies and overtopped by fretwork, really were the backs. The true fronts faced inward, upon gardens the most beautiful that abundant water and ceaseless care could make. Occasionally, looking afar down byways, which were quite as broad as the ordinary streets of modern cities, they saw, in the twilight, slow fountains at play; pomegranates, masses of scarlet bloom; tall clusters of lilies, and above all these the plane, the cypress and the odorous plumed palm.

On the main streets stood the shops. It was down the sub-streets, in the less dust and the greater quiet, that the people of Babylon had their homes and took the air on their housetops after sunset.

Here the pillars, of which a palm log formed the center and real support, were made to resemble marble by a heavy molding of stucco, sometimes severely plain, sometimes wrought into figures. About the capitals were strange little images, half beast, half human. These were household gods, which had a place somewhere in every home, unless it was the home of a Jew; and they were given place, if nothing worse, in some of them.

One of the lesser ways, at its divergence from the great street, was fringed densely with acacia and oleander. The sight was so refreshing that the strangers, not knowing where they were going, turned down it by inclination. A little way and the buildings became smaller and more simple. Children played their games under the trees and pigeons flew about, fearlessly. A little way ahead a ring of mounted men took up two-thirds of the traveled way. They were halted in front of a cottage. As the dromedaries filed past the Jews looked, wonderingly, for the men were in full armor and magnificently mounted. Between two of the horses a kind of hammock was swung. There was a high piercing shriek back of the cottage. Then two mailed men came out, carrying a woman between them. A third, who seemed to be the commander, followed. The silence of that which they bore, and the perfect deliberation of the men, struck Ariel more terribly than the cry.

"What meaneth it?" he asked of Kallai.

"I know not; look not back; they are royal guards, and this is Babylon."

In the next great street they turned again eastward. Everywhere were proofs of a vast and busy city. Chariots dashed past in the dust, this way and that way, so swiftly that the foot passengers, hundreds in number, seemed never out of immediate danger. Often a litter, gay with blue or red or yellow fringes, borne on poles on the shoulders of broad-

backed slaves, slipped by, only a little less swiftly than the chariot. Ponderous ox-carts, filled with bales and rolls of merchandise, swelled the stream. Negroes, bending under loads which seemed too heavy for one, hurried hither and thither. Cloth merchants, with heaps of shimmering wares slung over their arms or draped invitingly over the front and the sides of little wooden carts which they pushed about, called to the crowds to buy. The whistles, the laughter, the shouting, the thud of hundreds and hundreds of sandals, and other hundreds of bare feet in the earthen street, the creaking of wheels and the sullen volume of noises all together struck the young Jew heavily and forbiddingly. This was Babylon—that Babylon which he came from Judea to humiliate, to outwit, even to overthrow. Babylon! He had not expected to find it so large.

The riders halted, away inside the wall, in front of a flashy booth, open to the street like a fakir's stall. An old man, in a brown gown and with a tiny silken cap on his head was sitting at one end, like a fixture in the shop. Ariel spoke to him:

“Show us the way to an inn, good friend; we are strangers here.”

The shopkeeper glanced at the legs of the dromedaries, then at the strangers: “Turn left at the next broad street, go to the second byway and look down to the right. You will see a row of lights, which is the sign of the Inn of Haran.”

The speech was oily Aramaic, but the man had the look of a Jew. "We give thee thanks, and farewell," said Ariel in his own tongue.

"Ah, you are Jews, I see."

"Just in from Jerusalem."

He came out to them, changing his own speech to the western language at the next word: "From Jerusalem? Oh, I hoped ye came from Egypt. My son hath been there weeks past. He went down to Raphia with a load of rugs and linen."

"No, we are from the Holy City," said Ariel, laying emphasis on the name.

"Yes, yes; my son took out a splendid load, a splendid, splendid load." As often as they spoke of Jerusalem the old man spoke of Egypt.

They found the Inn of Haran, a four-story building, back under spreading poplars, far enough from the avenue to moderate the noise. Though it was not quite dark the place was brilliant with a countless number of iron lamps, clamped to the pillars. They girded every terrace, being so set as to cast the light outward, leaving the interior in a soft gloom. Black slaves hurried forth to care for the beasts and another, in lily-white, appeared on the steps to conduct the guests within.

In the outer room, or office, behind a polished counter, a middle-aged man sat on a bench, embedded in cushions. The Hebrew physiognomy was unmistakable, yet not more so than the Babylonian influence. He was in flowing silk; his white forearms were

clasped with bracelets and his fingers sparkled with rings.

"Good evening, sirs, may the gods be good to you. My house is yours." He spoke Aramaic and the words came like free honey.

"Peace to thee, and may the One God send it," Ariel replied in Hebrew.

"Forgive me, my good son; I see you are of my race. But the tongue is so little used about the city that I can not command it as I ought. We that have spent our lives here have fallen into the speech of the realm."

Ariel sighed, as he thought of his aged uncle's hatred of everything Chaldean. "We are from the desert, and weary. Can you give us refreshments and a place, for us and our beasts, until morning?" asked he.

"Or longer?" added Kallai, who knew the value of good impressions.

"We can, and the payment—a thousand pardons, sirs, with such as you it is mere form, yet I must speak of it, being so accustomed with those less distinguished——"

Ariel unslung his little leathern wallet from his waist and brought up one of the jewels. By chance it was a diamond. The innkeeper glanced at the men again, more narrowly.

"We have had no time to change this into currency."

The stone was duly weighed, in little scales at the end of the counter. "Its worth, oh, friend, is twenty



pieces of gold and three of silver. Shall I give you the balance, or hold it to your call?"

"It will be safe with you?"

"The richest in Babylon are my patrons, often and often."

Their names were written, with a stick of wax and charcoal, on a linen scroll. Opposite that of Ariel the sum in trust was set; then Haran struck a bell with a little mallet and a slave bowed himself in, to show them to their chamber.

Up steps, along a curtained hallway to a door, and they were led into a large room, already agreeably cool. Two of its sides were open to the night. The inner two were of lattice work and half-closed curtains showed that the privacy could be made more complete at will. The slave, a plump black, trained to silence, set half a dozen lamps to burning. Already a little breeze was fanning in from the south.

The slave withdrew, and Kallai was murmuring some appreciation of these comforts when another slave, black as the first, came in with a bundle under his arms, and a water-skin and a bowl of painted clay. While he undid his bundle and spread out towels, soaps and some half dozen of those unguents, dear to the senses of the East, held in tiny pottery flasks, a Babylonian girl followed him in. She was a smiling sturdy being, in a tight skirt and tan sandals; the left breast shone, uncovered by her habit. The man servant bent to his work. He bathed their faces, their hands and then their feet, and sprinkled their hair

with odorous waters. Meanwhile the girl, with a circular fan of ostrich plumes, kept the breeze whirring about them.

Then came the steward, a corpulent fellow with the earthy expression of the overfed. Roast kid, fresh fish, eggs, loin of fatted calf, eels, wheaten cakes in honey and cream, young onions, grapes from the vines that evening—he mentioned whatever came first to his mind, for he classified his guests by instinct. What he named they took, for they were as wolves.

A board was set; the linen was laid; another girl, so like the first that she might have been a sister, came with another fan. Together the women sang drinking songs until the feast was near the ending. Then two flagons of a liquor, strange to the Jews, but not to Babylon, were carried in and duly drained.

Soon afterward that subtle thrill which is the herald of intoxication stole upon the men. As in a dream they sat watching the servants remove the remains of their dining. Through a haze Ariel saw the laughing eyes of the first girl as she invoked the gentleness of some unnamable god upon his rest and as through a glass, darkly, Kallai watched her mate disappear through the doorway, with many an arch glance backward.

Arising to prepare for sleep, they found their legs unruly beneath them, and they laughed at their condition—which was nothing new. They fell, rather than lay, across the mattresses placed for them, and sleep laid hold of them even as they fell.

## CHAPTER X

### THE OLD WAREHOUSE

**T**HE royal square was Babylon's natural social center. The charmed territory ended abruptly at the edge of the walled embankment. Merchants strove unceasingly to gain or hold establishments as near as possible to some one of the many stairways of the elevation. By that position the chance of courtly patronage was increased and the rating among their fellows was governed; the shops nearest the landings being deemed the best. In size and lavishness they justified that estimation. Outside this inner row, by regular graduation, the character of the shops, indeed of the entire city, changed, not for the better. Out by the wall the city dwindled into comparative squalor and surpassing iniquity. The only exceptions to the rule were a few of the greater streets, like that by which the Jews had entered. These, throughout their length, maintained a semblance of industrial decency.

In the fifth great square below the royal elevation, fronting east on the river wall, there stood a rambling, one-story building which, through time and inattention, had come to seem a great excrescence beside the avenue. A landing led from the water's edge to the wall gate, but it was seldom used. The place had been

a vintner's warehouse. For reasons unknown it had been abandoned, long before, and now had fallen to other ownership and a novel use.

On the night when the men from Jerusalem lodged in the Inn of Haran, a little boat bore down-stream to the landing and two figures disembarked, secured the craft and entered the warehouse. Other figures, some arriving in boats, some coming out of the streets to the west, arrived and went in furtively, like men who dread pursuit. A later arrival came, walking alone, with the peculiar gait of an aged man who wishes to make all possible speed. He entered, into a space so large and dingy that the three little lamps, burning in a group in a far corner, did little more than emphasize the darkness.

A shawled figure arose from the door and challenged him: "Who cometh here."

The answer was long, and so strangely worded that an eavesdropper might have guessed that it was part of the shibboleth of some established order.

A few old casks, long empty, lay about on the earthen floor. Innumerable posts supported the roof timbers. The peculiar odor which earthen floors and emptiness create was heavy there.

He who had just arrived was a Jew, of shrewd determined countenance and a decisive mien, despite his age. As he went toward the lamps, a group of men gathered about him, saluting him gravely.

"Peace to thee, Zerubbabel," said one. "We feared

thou hadst fallen ill, or that some whim of the king had forbidden thy leaving the square."

"No, brethren, I came too easily. I fear my presence there was—but I will tell of that when the time is come. Are we all assembled?"

"No," said many at once. "*He* hath not come."

"He hath not? It is strange. More often it is he who waiteth for us."

Every man there was a Jew and nearly every one was past three score and ten. They spoke as long acquaintances. Some of them cast aside their dark long shawls, revealing garments of lighter colors. Mostly they stood or sat, wrapped about, plainly without a leader, and as yet betraying no purpose in the meeting.

"What is the word from toward the South Side, Ansil," an aged man inquired, as he laid his hand upon the arm of his nearest companion, one younger than the most.

"I fear to answer, father. Some of our people seem impressed. Many are not. And they that are, expect the thing to be done miraculously, without man's help. I tell them the time is near and they say, 'God let it be,' then they return to their shops, their wines and their other pleasures. Over their cups, when I am not near, they say, one to another, 'Where is the army, where are the spears and the battering rams? Better as we are than dead.' Their faith, oh, father, I fear, is small."

"Yes, so it seemeth; yet, chide them not, poor children; they shall know, in time."

"Breathe it not, but often and often I ask myself if *he* be not at fault. He will not show them how that they must not wait for God; that they must do."

A very old man, with a head so bald that it shone through the dusk like a bubble, drew near to him who had come in last:

"By what way camest thou, Zerubbabel?"

"Directly down the broad street, good Enos."

"Thou sawest nothing of *him*?"

"No. Strange, is it not! Yet it is a time of strange things. Know ye, this very day a raven flew to the ground in my garden and there made as if it fought with another. Then it flew away; the grass was clean as a floor."

"An omen, doubt it not; but who could interpret the like? Could evil have overtaken *him* I wonder?"

While they were speaking the door was opened softly. The three lamps flared as the night breeze sucked in. Every one in the group turned. A man, clad in the usual day garments of Jews, which were linen and light in color, came toward them. When he was among them he spoke, in a clear voice, strangely gentle:

"Peace be upon ye, my people."

Every one inclined his head, replying:

"And upon thee, oh, Daniel."

Moving farther into the light he turned as if to address them.

Perhaps a little below the average height of Jews, who then were a taller race than they are to-day, he

seemed almost small beside the patriarchal figures near him. He was old, yet he was but slightly bald. His hair, unlike that of the others shorn close and carefully, was not all white. His frame, which one might not describe either as spare or full, had about it a well-set squareness. His forehead was lofty and receding and indented between the eyes with a seam, telling of thought but not of bitterness. The thin nose curved, yet with a kind of comeliness. The full sensitive lips and the clean-shaven, strongly hinged chin had the creases of pleasantness; also of power. Eyes which seemed black, but were said to be dark gray in the sun, twinkled under thick brows, with a light not altogether of earth. However disappointing he might have been to the elder painters, or to the saints who dreamed of him as other than he was, the Hebrew Daniel was a man whom, seeing once, no student of physiognomy would ever forget, or so desire. He spread out his hands, the others bowed and he uttered a short prayer.

“Brethren, I trust that none of ye hereafter will be late at any meeting because of my example. I went out toward the Gate of the Founts to see our brother Lael, and Mary his wife. Their only lamb was carried away by the soldiers of the king, this afternoon. I sought to comfort them; thus I am late. Zerubbabel, what knowest thou?”

“As thou dost know, I went to the palace following the last assembly. As I represented myself as one of the larger merchants, the guards were kind. They said they would go to the king and plead for me for

audience. In an hour they came back, saying that the king was casting dice with one of the officers of the guard, and could not see me at once. Would I return to the palace the following morning? On the morrow the king was being entertained by a dancer from the South. I was put off from hour unto hour. It was so the next day, and the next. At last I left word that I would be in my shop, should Majesty call for me. This afternoon I tried again, without result."

"Thou sawest him not at all?"

"No, not at all."

"Grieve not, good brother; I hardly hoped for more. If thou hadst been admitted I fear he would have revealed no hint of his purpose. Who can know the mind of the king when the king knoweth it not!"

Zerubbabel spoke out hotly: "What we must have, brethren, is not a petitioner at court but a spy, one resident there, to bring us word of those designs that hatch under the throne."

"God knoweth it," said Daniel. "Our brother Zerubbabel speaketh as one inspired. Mistake not—I mean not that our feeble plotting can change what is to be—but it is pressed upon me that one of our race should go to court. The purpose I understand not; neither, I think, doth any other man." The simple directness of the manner made the speech sink in. Every hearer was silent for a time. Then he continued:

"I feel, as ye all do, that an evil design is shaping itself against us. The Lord will not be mocked, how-



ever. To find the Jew who will dare go there, and the means to send him, are tasks over which we need to pray." Again there was silence for a time.

The man who was the youngest among them spoke: "Oh, Daniel, our people in my district, which, thou knowest, is on the South Side, near the wall, are poor. They are murmuring. They will be more ready to go, when the Great Day cometh, than many who dwell in the shadow of the square. Yet they are backward in faith. They ask where is the hand which shall prevail against these walls to cast them down. What shall I say to them which they have not already heard?"

"Nothing new have I, my son. I have the promise of the Lord God. Is it not enough? He led us out of the wilderness. He warned us of the present. His warning, is it not fulfilled? Is His Promise less than His warning? Whose hand shall strike the blow I may not say. Whosoever it be, God's hand will strike through his. We, brethren, can not bring this thing to pass. We can but do the will of God, and keep good cheer. Tell this to all the people."

"And if they doubt?"

"Send for me. I will go among them and repeat it in other words."

The meeting then became a series of short addresses, often interrupted by explanations. Each speech discovered conditions much like those already described. For each man was the head of a Jewish organization in a certain district. The reports all contained the same discouragements. Jews drunken

with lust of power and ridden by the appetites which the court exemplified before the people; Jews rich and content with their lot; Jews poor and downtrodden, Jews high and low, forgetting that they were Jews, yet conscious that a yoke was on their necks, and missing the cause of it, and murmuring, not against denationalization but against the tyranny of the hour; hoping not for deliverance, but for a change of rulers.

To every representative Daniel gave particular advice. When the last had spoken he inquired if aught else was to be considered.

Enos, he of the shining head, spoke, after a little silence:

“Dear one, to-night thou camest late. Thou canst not know what fear was in our minds because of this. These streets are alive with daggers. It is whispered that the king believes we are about to arise against him. Greatly we have striven to keep our labors, and thy leadership, secret; but what can be kept from the wicked mind of him who is called the Spider, who watcheth over the king! We may be marked for death. For one of us to die were little matter. But if thou wert taken——”

Daniel smiled as a father might smile at a child. “Good Enos, and all of ye, look to thyself. Come and go with what precaution seems wise to ye. As for me, be not afraid.” Again they were hushed for a time.

Quietly, in little groups, they passed out and disappeared by different ways. The patriarch blew out

the three tapers and found his way through the darkness to the door. He turned westward and walked close by the building, in the direction of the avenue. The way was unlighted, yet he moved leisurely. Beyond the corner an open space intervened before the by-street. Heaps of old lumber, overrun with vines, pressed in upon the path.

Two men reared up from a hiding-place, almost at his heels. "That is the man," whispered one of them. The other took a step forward and drew a short sword.

"Are you sure?" he asked, falling back and speaking against the ear of his companion.

"Yes, I know him. He always comes last. Strike!"

The man moved forward again and again turned back: "By Ishtar, that man has a beard."

"Fool, wait and watch." Drawing his own blade, the speaker crept close to the slowly moving figure. Daniel stopped; his face upturned, his hands clasped at his back. They heard him say, softly, as though in converse with a friend: "They do declare Thy glory, and that, of truth, is Thy handiwork. I would I could see them more." Then he moved on.

He who had called the other a fool came back. The first taunted him: "Had he not a beard, as I said?"

"By the hundred gods I believe the villain had. Till he halted I would have stood my life he was shaven clean. A mist came over my eyes. The air is bad; we must come another night."

“What will the Spider say?”

They hurried away together, striking up to the northward, talking little, and that in barbarous gutturals common to the very lowest orders.

As they approached a flight of the royal steps two guards presented spears. They gave a token and the guards set spears in rest and let them pass. Up on the great foundation, they followed the southern spread of the esplanade, past fountains in play, past doors innumerable, past patches of flower garden, sunken in the masonry, and colossal urns and pedestals upholding lamps. Near the southwest corner they disappeared into a narrow passage, absolutely dark. Deep in, they came to a door on which the foremost struck a blow.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SPIDER'S DEN

THE king's own mansion, his court and the abiding place of many of his minions, was a huge rectangular heap. Four sheer walls, running up to massive, overhanging cornices, sullen even at their ninety-foot distance from the bottom; walls without windows, with doors at the base line only, the monotony of their giant faces broken at regular intervals by bold shoulders in the masonry, it was a pile which brought the world thither, to look and to marvel.

Chambers and galleries ramified within it, after a regular plan, but a plan of such complexity that the oldest servant might be lost therein. Parts of the roof were floored, and, gained by stairways within, gave an unequalled view to those with energy enough to scale them. But greater portions were given over to skylights, open shafts which let the air and the light down into the depths of the mass. From the bottoms of some of them, the stars were visible at midday.

The door which the two worthies reached at the end of the passage toward the southwest corner was opened by a creature, small, black, furtive and lean to emaciation. He was one of six hundred eunuchs on duty in and about the palace. His kind formed nine-tenths of the menial population of the quarter.

Brushing past him they crossed a small court, above which the stars could be seen, and stopped before heavy hanging curtains. The eunuch, following, gave an odd cry, and the curtains drew apart, disclosing a casement. Within was a room, cool and almost damp. A huge clepsydra stood against the wall at the right. In the farther corner two scantily clad Nubian girls, with fans of the diameter of chariot wheels, stood, one on each side of a man, sunk in a padded chair. His face was bent down and he did not lift it as the men advanced. The light of the place was not to the favor of the two arrivals. They were coarse of dress and feature and savagely awkward as they stood, leering at the girls. One of them had great holes in his ears and his left cheek was traversed by a frightful scar.

The man in the chair stirred suddenly and lifted up a countenance, overrun with little seams, like a raisin. They were not the seams of age, for he was hardly fifty, but of ceaseless thinking. His skull was grandly turned and sprinkled with light reddish hair, cropped so close that the scalp shone through. Instead of eyes, two sockets lay, like dead things, under the netted brows.

“Kneel and salute!”

The voice was uncannily soft, like a hiss. The knees of the newcomers trembled as they knelt on the flags.

“We have knelt already, Lord Blastus,” muttered he of the disfigurement.

"You *have* but you *had not*. Did the dogs gather in their kennel to-night?"

"Yes, Lord, the whole pack. We hid beside the door, but we could not hear the words they spoke; only the sound."

"Could not hear! Gods, open the ears of you with eyes. Maybe if they were taken from you—did you go inside? You say the place is dimly lighted."

"No, it is not so dim, Lord, but that they must have seen us had we tried. They have a guard at the door. We feared they might find themselves watched and change their plans."

"That fear; I understand it well. Did the leader come out alone, as he did the last time?"

He who had first spoken said quickly, "No, he came out with several others; we had no chance."

"You saw him distinctly?"

"No; they put out the light, and the place is gloomy."

"How knew you that man from the rest?"

The visitor stammered and stopped. The man in the chair drew a soft breath and the hiss of his voice sharpened:

"What height is he?"

"Half a handbreadth less than myself."

"Stand here by the chair." The blind one arose, placed one hand against the speaker's ear and stood thinking. "How old, say you, was he?"

"He was old; how old I know not. He was not bald. Light on his feet he seemed."

"Smooth shaven?"

The man hesitated.

"Ye children of jackals, say it out; had he a beard or none?"

"Lord, we believe he had a small beard."

"What name did they give him?"

"They called him Daniel."

"Go. At the end of the first hour after sunset to-morrow come to me."

They hurried away, not risking even a parting glance at the attendants. The fans kept on, rhythmical, noiseless almost as the clepsydra over against the wall. The chin of the man was on his breast and he was motionless. Suddenly he threw out his arms and beckoned to the handmaids, furiously impatient:

"Here, you—I am going to Majesty."

Taking each an arm they led him out of the chamber.



## CHAPTER XII

### TWO MEETINGS

**W**EST of the royal square and south of the avenue leading out to the Gate of Lions the old physician Nahum lived in a modest house, surrounded by citron trees and ringed with oleanders. One man servant cared after his humble wants, and those of another person, who occupied the rear of the upper story. Those apartments were plain to a degree. Two rooms looked down into a tiny garden, which, though lacking those rare plants which were considered indispensable to well conditioned premises, yet was pleasant to see. A little terrace, really another room, jutted from them over a part of the space below. The servant found little to do up there. The rooms were always in order. One held a couch of the plainest design, a wooden bench, over which a few pillows and a length of coarse gray cloth were thrown, and a chair, straight-backed and unupholstered. In the other was a curtained recess, with pegs on which clothing could be hung. There, too, was a stationary desk with open shelves upon which several rolls of papyrus and linen and a little stack of clay tablets were placed in order. Two stools, of wood, well worn, completed the furnishings.

He who dwelt in this part of the house came and went so quietly that his residence was almost unknown

to the nearest neighbors. None of the few who sometimes saw him enter or leave, guessed that he was other than an aged Jew, coming for herbs or bitters, or more probably a horn of drink with a fellow of the same despised race. That he was old, and a Jew, was all the most inquisitive knew of him; and old Jews, saving they had wealth, and this he seemed to lack, were of slight concern to the Lady of Empires, as they were, and are, to many another part of earth.

The morning after the gathering in the old warehouse, Ariel, clad in the costly linen brought from Jerusalem, went down to the office of the inn. "Where is the owner of the house?" he asked of a fat young idler, apparently half Jew, half Babylonian, who lay, rather than sat, in a pillowed seat against the east window.

"The owner is in the garden."

"Do you live here?"

The young man raised his head, curious: "Where else should one live? Yes. And you?"

"My home is in Jerusalem. I am here on business."

"Something in the way of beads or rings? My brother has the most adorable shop on the street of the Red Arrow, near the third imperial stairway."

"No. I am come to see Daniel, called Belteshazzar. My uncle knew him in youth."

"I have heard his name. A vintner, is he not?"

"The owner, you say, is in the garden?"

"On through the passage to the rear; you will find him somewhere."

Haran, armed with a purple fan, was drowsily and peevishly directing the labor of a troop of black slaves, naked except for loin-cloths, who were weeding vegetable beds and masses of flowers. A fountain blew up its spray in the center.

"Ah, the gods—the One God—send you peace. The servants, were they courteous? Your companion, how is he?"

"It is well with us. I come to ask a favor."

"Speak it, son; this place is at command of such as ye are."

"I have business with Daniel, here in Babylon called Belteshazzar. Canst direct me to him?"

"Daniel, Daniel; he who once was at court? I saw him once; it is years since. He was on a corner, preaching to a little group gathered about him. Art sure he is still in the city? His favor at court is long since gone to nothing."

"So I have heard; but he is here and known to thousands of our people. I wonder that thou dost not——" He checked himself.

"So. But, son, when you know this city better you will learn that one may live his lifetime by a neighbor and never learn his name. Here man's friend and his god are made of gold." So saying he called a slave with a wizened face. "Go to Enos, the jeweler in the second square below us; say that a Jew, just from Jerusalem, is here, seeking Daniel, him who once was at court and there honored under the name of

Belteshazzar. Bring his reply." The slave bowed and was gone.

"Enos will know if any one knows. He follows all the Jewish movements. I am so occupied I find less time for them. And they grow less with time. Yet, son, the tongue sounds sweet in my ears. How looks the City of David?"

"Sir, it is in ruins."

"So I supposed. How could it be otherwise?"

"But it is to be rebuilt, more glorious than before."

The landlord linked his arm in the arm of the guest: "Son, it may be. Who knows? David and his fair son, where are men like them to lead such a task? Where is the money, the strength, the welded determination? Our people have grown fast to the East. This is home to them."

"Is it not a prison, and a place of abomination?"

"So it is said; yet its walls are far apart and there is so much sound comfort between them." Haran's manner changed subtly. He added, in Hebrew: "Son, thou art a stranger here. Give ear to me. The talk thou hast made in my hearing can do no harm as it is: given to all, it might work otherwise. Babylon is Babylon. There are those who fly to the king with such words as thou hast let fall. Sometimes the utterers of foolish things disappear and come not again. Merchants of wealth and standing are so taken, and their goods, their gardens, even their women and slaves, go into royal keeping, 'for the good of the

state.' It is whispered that those who end so have been seen going here or there at unseemly hours and holding clandestine meetings with Jews. Care needs be taken by him who, being a Jew, would keep alive in Babylon."

The slave returned, saying that Enos begged that the young man come to him, in his shop, unattended. "Go," said Haran, "and keep my counsel in thy heart."

Being minutely directed, Ariel set forth down an avenue flanked with shops. In the fronts merchandise of every land and of all varieties known to the tastes of that time, extended invitation. The district was just awakening to another day. Pigeons, thick in the streets, arose in droves before the occasional cart or the more frequent pedestrian. Light trucks, heaped with fresh garden produce, just arriving, rattled past; at intervals a litter, born along leisurely, while some one, reclining beneath its awning swept the market for some delicacy for a mid-morning breakfast, caught the eyes; and more rarely still a chariot, driven by a bare-armed, bare-legged youth, his head in a cap of grape leaves and his black locks caught with a fillet, showed that some son of Babylon elected to take the morning air. Drinking houses, so numerous that it seemed to Ariel that none could hope for large patronage, stood in the more prominent places, the urns heaped with fresh fruit, despite the early hour. Sometimes the snatch of a song from within told that a revel was beginning—or ending.

Passing through scenes like these, each taking hold

of his imagination, the son of Levi came at last to the jeweler's shop.

It was little more than a broad stall with an open side to the avenue. A counter of wood, deeply worn, extended along the front and overjutting, like a shelf. At one end a section was hinged, to serve, when lifted, as a door. Back of the counter, rising tier after tier, were trays of trinkets, displayed to pretty advantage, being out of the sun, yet near enough to the street to cast their glitter into the eyes of every passer-by.

Sitting on a stool which raised his sage head barely above the counter was an old man with a little black cap on his glassy crown. In his booth, in the warehouse or wherever seen Enos was the same. The aspect of his face was patriarchal, even saintly. One might believe that the baubles in which he dealt were less than the diversions of a mind chiefly concerned with things more lasting. Looking upon him, Ariel thought, with sudden tenderness, of the aged uncle waiting somewhere among the ruins of the Holy City. Bending across the counter he spoke with warm assurance:

"Peace to thee, father; thou art Enos, the jeweler?"

"I am. Thou art a Jew, I hear, and lately come from Jerusalem?" The manner was chill, the expression unresponsive.

"Yes, I came only yesterday."

"Thy name?"

"Ariel, the son of Levi."

"And thy errand?"

"I come on important business with Daniel."

"And what is the nature of this business with that one whom, thou sayest, is named Daniel?"

The innkeeper's warning sprang to mind and checked his tongue. "I have an important message to give him. It concerns ourselves."

"Then, son, go forth into the city and find him." The shopkeeper bent upon the visitor a gaze, half triumphant, half amused. In it there was more of amiability than of sarcasm. Leaving his stool he began to dust his shelves, which already were as dustless as the insides of the jewels they displayed.

Ariel hesitated; turned as if to go. Then disappointment arose bitterly in his throat and he turned back: "My good father, as I said I am just from Jerusalem. I have sought Daniel through others but I did not find him. Lately I learned that some danger lay in the search for him. So I spake less than the truth, just now. My business with Daniel concerns not ourselves alone; it concerns the Jews of all the world."

"Come into the booth," said Enos. He raised the wooden latch and lifted the section of counter. He placed a stool for Ariel and they sat, facing each other. The old face was enkindled.

"Now tell me why thou seekest this man. I may be able to aid thee; I may not. It shall depend."

When the account was given he leaned forward, extending his hands: "God bless thee and thy work, my son. I will take thee to Daniel myself. We who

watch for the coming, from this whirlpool, must not fail in our precautions. Daniel, most of all, must be cared for, as he will not care for himself. His faith that he is safe, we others believe, doth sometimes tempt God's anger. Blessed be His mercies. May He keep thy young mind out of the mire. Mark that, my son. The mire has nearly engulfed us all—the mire of license. Come now with me; no, wait." Passing out of the shop he hurried into his house close by. In a moment he was back and with him came a girl. Without ceremony of introduction he left her in the booth and with his arm through Ariel's, hurried down a by-street, pouring out at every step the hope, the longing, the promise of deliverance from the Gentile.

Southward, through a maze of lesser ways and by a succession of turns they went until they came to the house of the old physician. The neighborhood was vocal with thrushes, flitting among the trees and hedges. Ascending the narrow stairs at the rear, the jeweler knocked. A clear voice answered, "Enter in peace."

Daniel was seated but he arose and made welcome with the quiet grace of one accustomed to visitors. Ariel, not yet understanding that this was the patriarch, waited for Enos to proceed.

"Oh, brother, here is a youth, unstained, who cometh from the land ye love. From Judah itself he cometh, in a manner which, in part, I have made him tell me. I leave thee and hurry away, for my child is alone in the booth and—this is Babylon."



"I seek the Hebrew Daniel," said Ariel.

"I am he."

In a kind of transport, Ariel clasped the man's knees. Daniel raised him up gently, caused him to sit upon one of the little stools and drew the other near. "From Jerusalem, to see me? Tell it all, my dear one, all."

Then came the story, wild, childish, sublime in its very folly. Daniel smiled as he listened. Yet the hope and the faith of it caused the dark eyes to glow and the lips to grow firm. At the end of an hour he understood how that high resolve and doting devotion had led a keeper of sheep into Babylon to hasten the work of Jehovah. The utter failure of the boy to comprehend the task in which he was so zealous of enlisting had found its way to the great heart long before. The voice was even more gentle than its wont when he replied:

"Fair son, the love of the Lord was in thine uncle's heart and in thine. The liberation shall come, for He hath said it. We are His little ones. Thou knowest little of the state of our people here, or of the dangers which lie in this Babylon. As yet I know not how thou canst best serve the Cause. But the inn is not the place for thee. Go, bring thy belongings here and abide with me until we think, and pray."

Disappointment, rather than enthusiasm, came over Ariel as he heard this. Overlooking the honor of the invitation, he thought it somehow amiss that his arrival was taken so lightly. Yet he thanked the patri-

arch, and, promising to return by midday, hurried toward the Inn of Haran.

Half-way thither he started across a street midway of its intersection with another when, down to his left, a covered litter came sweeping like a bird. Eight Nubian bearers, stark except for the linen bandages drawn tightly about their loins, ran under the poles, in such perfect step that the sixteen feet fell with the rhythm of two. The canopy, rising hood-like, was of the whiteness of marble. Gorgeous tassels floated from its upper corners half-way to the ground. The splendor of the equipage bewildered him for a moment, the more so as, being near the middle of the street, he was undecided which way to move. His discomfiture was increased by the bearer at the rear on the right, who, even as he ran, cracked a short thick whip like a wagoner's lash. The fellow yelled in a fierce voice something which Ariel did not understand. As the outfit was upon him he drew back a pace or two. The bearers passed him, turning sharply down the street to the right. He who had yelled cut out and backward with the whip. The Jew threw up his arms but the thong stung his shoulder like heated wire.

Blows had formed no part of Ariel's rearing. At the touch he felt a sensation never known but once before—once when he clutched the neck of the man who dogged Nana in Jerusalem. It blazed up into that ecstatic frenzy which, analyzed, is the hunger to kill. He sprang after the litter before it completed the turn.

The black glanced backward. Seeing the movement in pursuit he cried some order to the others; they leapt forward with a single impulse. The same instant he swished the whip backward and the lash laid open a little crimson gash in the Jew's neck. Then Ariel was alongside. The bearer yelled again and drew a little dagger from a sheath on the inner side of the pole. The shepherd's fist, by accident rather than clear intent, landed against the base of the ear and the black pitched forward. The blow was of that kind which is delivered with a stiffened arm and a swift half-turn of the trunk. Before the man could straighten Ariel snatched the whip and brought the loaded grip down across his head. The others came to a sudden stop. The one next ahead of him who had fallen, still upholding the pole, slashed at the Jew with a knife of his own. Clutching up that which had slipped from the hand of the first, and still holding the whip, Ariel faced the new antagonist. The others set down their burden, a little roughly, and rushed upon him. He would have seen little of Babylon, and of the deliverance nothing, had not the curtains of the hood been drawn apart that instant. A woman's voice commanded: "Wait, you hounds, save him alive."

The arms, uplifting blades, dropped in quick obedience. The blacks drew apart, their heads inclining. Then the curtains were pushed still farther apart and a face looked out, a dimpled oval face with gray-brown eyes and a low wide forehead, girt across at the

encroachment of the hair with a band of spun silver. Above and about this the black massed hair lay in billows. A little white hand, loaded with rings, held the cloth aside.

"Come here."

Ariel, flushed and still panting from his exertion, went a step nearer.

"Nearer; are you afraid?"

"No, I am not afraid." There was defiance in look and attitude. He stepped to the pole and looked into the face. He studied those features a moment, conscious of a strange pleasure. As suddenly conscious that a woman's charms were working upon him, he turned his eyes to the ground.

"Who are you, Jew?"

"Ariel, son of Levi. I am late of Jerusalem."

"How long since?"

"I came here yesterday."

"Why did you stand in the way of the runners?"

"I did not know which way they were about to turn. I could not understand what the driver cried out to me."

"Mistress, he stood in our way and would not move."

"Hush——" The little hand raised, ever so quickly and her eyes spilled fire. "What more, Jew?"

"The man there struck me with his whip as he passed. I overtook and struck him."

"Did you see the front of the carriage?"

"I saw it, yes."

"Go there and look again." Curious and a little ashamed, he went to the front. Blazoned in pale blue, on the cloth between the down-curving ends of the pole, he saw a winged lion.

"When you see that sign, Jew, understand it. Will you remember?" Her eyes were bent on his and a little smile was hiding behind the stained lips.

Ariel blushed and stammered and betrayed all the confusion which he felt, and it was deep.

"What is it?" She was smiling frankly now and the curtains, drawn still more apart, permitted a glimpse of a round white throat and a pair of remarkable shoulders, rising out of a drapery like light mist.

"I am sorry if I—interrupted you—I did not intend to—the negro struck me. Shall a man be struck and stand helpless? Not if his name be my name."

She laughed outright, still looking searchingly into his face. "What you have done might send you to the crows this afternoon."

Ariel felt alarm spring up in his breast, but he answered steadily: "What I did I would do again. He struck me first."

"Ah, but you halted a royal palanquin, and wounded a runner, and you are a Jew. But," she spoke with a pretty burst of graciousness, "I forgive the Jew, this once. Why, does he think?"

"I think it is because I ought to be forgiven. Is a man less a man because he is a Jew?"

"Oh, ho!" Her eyes were lambent fire and she

~~scanned~~ pleased: "Good, brave; but that is not the reason. Guess again."

"I can not do it, lady. Tell me."

"No, not now. Some time I may. You might guess it, if you were not a Jew: perhaps, even though you are, you may. Who knows?" A word and the bearers were in their places, broad shoulders under the pads of the poles. He who carried the whip rolled his red eyes evilly upon the stranger. Another word and they would be going. Their leg muscles were taut as they listened for the signal. Out from the curtains, as they were being caught together, came a glance, a smile and the gleam of a shoulder. The bearers were checked.

"Where do you live in Babylon?"

"I am now at the Inn of Haran in the third square yonder."

Then the outfit disappeared in the dust of its own raising.

Who was it he had seen? The queen? Surely not, yet who but a queen could have such shoulders, such eyes, and such breadth of graciousness? Then he drove these thoughts from him, remembering who he was, and what his mission in this slough of iniquity. But as he went his reflections were more pleasurable than disturbing.

He had not been gone from the patriarch more than the half of an hour when the old physician, in his rooms down-stairs, had a patient whose compara-

tively full yet milk-white face might have raised wonder as to what his ailment specially was. He found the physician measuring out liquids in little earthen breakers.

“Is he above?”

“I think so. Go up, if thou wilt.” Then, seeing the drawn and troubled look he inquired: “No evil hath befallen I trust, good Ansil?”

“Evil! O God of the Jews, my brother, the aged Malach. This morning at sunrise he was found dead in his little garden. All about the fountain and along the walks were spade marks, showing how the earth had been turned up. A cord was about his neck and his legs were broken. If he told where his treasure was or not none but the murderers will ever know.”

“Malach! Ah, there is the curse again. He was reputed to have a treasure, hidden about his house.”

“And so he had, yet he dwelt without servants, excepting them that came to him by day. We of his kin have warned him, often and often. Belshazzar’s jackals skulk after us all. I tell thee, Nahum, we must have some way to reach the king. We must have a spy. Who knoweth when a general massacre will begin!”

“Who knoweth, indeed; but who could be a spy? How could he come and go?”

The younger man flung out his arms, despairingly: “Almighty One, hast Thou forgotten us!”

“Go up to Daniel; he knoweth best what to say to the sorrowing.”

Bursting into the room above, the visitor came face to face with the patriarch, who was reading.

"Great One, I come with evil news."

"Then speak it not; we who serve the Lord should know no evil."

"But they have murdered my eldest brother!"

"Malach!" Daniel was all seriousness in an instant. "Poor son, sit here by me." He flung an arm about the bent shoulders: "I sorrow with thee, Ansil. I feared it. The royal dogs scent gold as the dogs of the streets scent carrion. It was not well for him to live alone, nor should he have made his shop on the South Street so beautiful. And yet, his sorrows are past. Do not mourn; knowest not that the righteous dead pity us who pity them?"

"Aye, but why did I let him live alone! Was I not warned! Accursed as Babylonians are, there is one among them with something like a heart."

"And that one is—"

"Kadric, the ex-priest. It was three weeks ago that I met him, at the foot of the southeast stairs. He took me aside and said to me: 'Son, thy brother is rich. I was in his shop to-day; he dwells alone. Were it not better otherwise, when robbers are abroad each night?' He said no more. It should have been enough."

"I have heard of this same Kadric. He is full of sophistries, they say, and a scoffer, but not deeply bad. If he hath a heart I bless God for it. They are needed hereabout."



Ansil dashed the tears from his eyes: "The time is coming, Great One, when the sword shall smite us all in our sleep. Kadric might aid us, if he could be persuaded. Some one must."

"The same thought hath been in mine own mind, Ansil. I think the Lord will send us a man. Perhaps He hath sent him already."

The young Jew went away, sorrowing and wondering. Mystic that he was, the Hebrew Daniel seldom spoke except to purpose. Yet to Ansil, as to many of the Jews, the steadfast faith in holy providence seemed out of accord with Babylon and its ways.

As the young man went away he met another young man, with a fair skin covered with tan, who swung along, his head in air and confidence plain upon him. At his side hurried a small wiry Jew, arms full of bundles and face overspread by a heat of expectation which shone through hair and sunburn. Having met with Kallai as he came away from the inn, Ariel was leading him for a word with Daniel. A little later the khankeeper endured the proudest moment of his life.

That afternoon he turned westward, one of a caravan setting out for Tyre, and destined to pass through Jerusalem on its way. He carried many memories, many promises and much sweet cheer for those at home. And in the thickness of his neck-cloth he bore, wrapped up in a fold of silk, a string of beads of lapis lazuli, bluer than heaven. They were Ariel's remembrance to the Rose of Jerusalem.

## CHAPTER XIII

### HIS MAJESTY

ON the night of the congregation of the Jews in the old wine warehouse the throne chamber of the palace seemed almost deserted. Royalty was there indeed, and so was beauty, but every guard was banished excepting one, Gur, the huge black eunuch of the king's suite. A spear was his only weapon. He stood at the left of the throne, an immensely heavy chair of cedar, square-armed, tall, and crusted with plates of the finer metals, into which the smiths of Nebuchadnezzar had embedded jewels.

The chair sat on a dais of stone which ran across the west end of the room. Three steps descended from its level to the floor. Surrounded by pillows which half-engulfed him sat the king, watching, silently and intently, the antics of a pair of Median dancing girls. They were dark complexioned, voluptuous creatures, such as speak to one side only of the nature of man.

Nude to their waists; from waists to knees clad only in skirts of cord, depended from silken girdles clasped low about the hips, they executed, before the dais steps, a panoramic story of sufficient obscenity to have astonished the most blasé roué of modern times. The king found pleasure in such exhibitions, but a strange, or it may have been a natural, bent of his taste led him to enjoy them most when no man else

beheld them. Women, so long as they were not of his own blood, he always desired as spectators with him.

Accordingly, standing in groups or lying upon heaps of the skins of lions and tigers which covered the floor about the dais, were dozens of ladies of the court. Out by the walls were rows of serving girls, menials of a distinct class, called in to pour the wine and to see what novelties the king provided in his house.

The queen was pale and apparently ill. From her place, at the monarch's right, she looked listlessly about, never at the dancers. Sometimes she glanced up at the king, and often her eyes wandered thence to a young woman, curled languidly on a great soft pelt, right at the royal feet; a sinuous, sensuous figure of a woman, with gray-brown eyes and utterly splendid shoulders.

Through the skylight, high above, the stars peeped into the giant chamber. A wide balcony ran all around it, the inner edge upheld by thirty pillars of gray marble. The greatness of their girth mocked the weight they held, and from their capitals the heads of elephants, carved life-size, faced outward and downward. Little stairways at the sides connected balcony and floor. Innumerable burning candlesticks stood out from rings, clasping the pillars, their flame steady in the hushed air. Such was the seat of power of the Prince Belshazzar. Nabonidus, the royal sire, was still alive,

but he had given all the powers of regnancy to this, his son.

Leaning forward, a great goblet of red wine in his right hand, he watched the writhings of the dancers, out of dull dark eyes. At times the very indecencies were turned to a coarse humor, designed to arouse laughter. At such times the king laughed not, nor even smiled. He watched like one rapt, face thrust forward, stooping shoulders drawn up, his left hand clasping and unclasping over the arm of the throne.

About his low and deep-lined forehead the crown, a leathern band, silk within, without raw gold crusted with jewels, blazed under the jet hair. The beard, fashioned in seven heavy curls, fell over his breast, and his fingers tangled it, nervously. Not fifty years of age, he looked years older. It was not the look of age merely. It was the look of one physically weakened and mentally warped. That he was, and in him the degeneracy of the kingdom saw itself personified.

The dancers fell upon the floor, heads toward the dais. Instantly a band of musicians, under the north balcony, flung their instruments into boisterous sound and simultaneously the applause of the women, expressed by their clapping of hands and cries of "Oah! Oah!" burst from every side. Belshazzar straightened, glanced sharply, almost suspiciously about him and drank his goblet to the stem. A girl refilled it the moment it touched the wood again. It was a rule, well understood at court, that when the king lifted

his glass to drink and found it empty, the servant in waiting should die.

At that moment the Nubian handmaidens came in from the first door on the south, each holding a hand of the sightless Blastus. As they appeared, the chief of the musicians silenced the instruments with a wave of his hand. The girls led their charge to the lower step. The queen looked up from her brooding, touched with a new interest. The whole court paused. Belshazzar, biting his lips, waited till the blind man knelt below the chair:

“What brings you here, my Blastus?”

“A matter of weight, oh, Majesty, as you should know.”

“Rest it till to-morrow; we are in the midst of entertainment.”

“Sire, it is of the first importance.”

“Then I will hear it, after Ista dances.”

“Hear me first, Majesty; this thing comes close to us all.”

The royal glance shifted from the figure on the steps to the figure curled at his feet: “Does it concern the throne?”

“Majesty, it is no matter to discuss here, in the hearing of all these women.”

Belshazzar looked down, wondering. The chamber was a hush of listening. “How know you there are women here?”

“The flutter of ribbons, the perfume, the soft breathing—they are as different from the grinding of

spear butts as the court is different from the camp. Dismiss them, if it be the king's will, and let me speak."

At a word the whole assemblage moved to the far end of the chamber, even the leading girls going with it. The queen withdrew into a recess under the balcony. Blastus crept up the steps and spoke low:

"The Jewish leaders met again to-night, in the warehouse; I told you before of the location. Two men, rough fellows picked up from the south slums, were hidden near the door."

"Did they learn——"

"They learned nothing, being fools. I must have another."

"You shall have a score, a hundred. Choose whom you will, even of the bodyguard. I would put down this spirit while it is tender."

"I want only one, and none of the guard. I want the Lady Ista."

The king's brow thickened and he caught his breath with a hiss: "Your wisdom, blind one, is esteemed in the palace; royal favors are shown you; but hearken: dare you never to speak of this again. Ista is for the king."

"Majesty mistakes. A plot is afoot. Its purpose is cunningly masked, but if it be not the overthrow of the dynasty, I myself mistake."

"Gods! Dare they that? Stay, I will anticipate. Legions shall sweep through the city by night and every Jew shall die!"

"But who knows whether or not they have the

sympathy of other races? Moreover, by massacre their treasure, the better part of them, would be lost. They are burying it."

"Speak on; all you know."

"I know there is a secret organization and it is large, how large I can not learn. The man at the base of it is crafty. I can not be sure of him yet. But, was there not, in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, a certain learned Jew, who was honored as one of the Magians?"

"There was. His Hebrew name was Daniel. I have heard his magic spoken of by the priests as a devilish art."

"Where is this Daniel now?"

"I have no knowledge of him. I supposed him dead. Think you it is he that leads them?"

"Some leader with more than mortal powers is at the head of it. He is old. That much I know. That much points to this Daniel, none other."

"Entrap him, then, and put him away."

"I did so plan, but my spies were wild asses without the ass's ears. Now I believe it wiser to wait. What these curs intend, what preparations they make, who helps them—I must know all this. Then the sedition can be uprooted whole. A blow struck now might drive it into hiding, only to grow again. Majesty knows how the Jew named Tarmam was imprisoned, months ago. He starved, but he told us nothing. Young Burbee was next. His hide was stripped from him by inches, down in the pits. It is made into san-

dals now, perchance, and their patter, on the feet of whoever wears them, tells as much as he would tell. But those men knew. Torture is nothing to that race. Devils are in them. We must study before we strike."

"What service is it that you plan for the Lady Ista?"

"I will find a man among them who is young and vain and acquainted with the scheme. Him I will cause to be brought to court, not a prisoner but a royal guest. Ista I will direct to drain him of everything he knows. Love opens locks, oh, King, which neither iron nor the fire can move."

"Think you they plan a sudden uprising?"

The blind man made a little gesture, betraying impatience: "If I knew that I should not be here. It is that I seek. Before to-morrow's sunset I shall find out one who can tell. They say the Lady Ista is fair to look upon. Her cleverness is a proverb in the palace. I ask that she be given to my direction, absolutely and without delay, until this business is accomplished."

"What if they strike before you learn?"

"They can not. Any unusual movement among them will reach me the hour it begins. We will pluck up the plant before its seed is ripened."

The king patted his sandals against his footstool, tangling his fingers into the curls of his beard. Then: "Ista is close to the king's heart, Blastus, yet the king consents. If harm should come to her of the service"—the dull eyes emitted a sudden and sullen fire—"they, who seduced me to it were happier dead."



"I take the obligation, Majesty, and with thanks. May I depart?"

He gave a single sibilant call. The girls hurried forward and led him away. The court figures reassembled, talking, laughing, making as if no interruption had occurred. Ista curled down by the footstool. The king sat, dogged and speechless for a little time, then he quaffed his wine, threw his hand up in signal for silence and commanded Ista to dance the dance of the two flames.

Up from the skin upon which she had lain while the brown dancers anticked and from which she had moved with the listless resentment of a cat when the blind man came, Ista, the favorite, the envied of every minion, the woman whom even the queen feared, and hated with a hate which was not all jealousy, arose, and with something like a yawn stepped down from the dais.

Loosening the fillet she let fall the thick mane of her hair. Her costume was like that of the other dancers, only of richer stuff, and her sandals were of milk-white kid. She looked at the king and smiled, a fiery enkindling smile. An answering light came into the liver-like orbs of His Majesty. His sagging lids drew half together. The queen turned her face aside to hide the rush of anger to her cheeks. The women gathered around, looking on with that half hidden jealousy which is said to be observable, sometimes, in the sex in these less barbarous days. Turning around and around on her toes, her arms extended, *Ista began the Song of the Flames:*

"O Majesty, high Majesty,  
 Thy slave doth crave her master's eyes;  
 Will splendor stoop that grace may see  
 If lightness can not please the wise?  
 Man lives and dies and he is gone  
 But love lives and the wine runs on."

Then came the dance. She flew, she spun. The lassitude which had seemed a part of her was gone utterly. She quivered and blazed with energy, yet not for an instant did the feet lose the intricate path of the steps. A triumphant expression grew in her face. The steps became slower and ceased, and she sang the middle stanza, a hint of old Accadian melody in its ringing:

"Robes of the locust's wings are mine;  
 The skin within like marble gleams;  
 I am a cup of twinkling wine,  
 I am a couch of pleasant dreams,  
 And like sunbeams at noon would be  
 My lips to thine, O Majesty."

She was creeping toward the dais steps, all in time to an air which a harpist, over by the nearest pillar, was coaxing from an instrument taller than he.

"I come, a sacrifice I come,  
 A lyre of fire alive I play;  
 Ye singers hush, ye harps be dumb,  
 O Majesty, look not away,  
 Behold I pray, my robes I spurn,  
 And like a sacrifice I burn!"

In an impetuous burst of sound, fitted to action consummately studied, she sprang from the film of her

loosened garments, and up the steps, like a ruddy flash of flame, and collapsed at the royal footstool. The king stepped down and threw his robes around her and she arose, laughing, within them. The audience applauded loudly and with answering laughter, as the great eunuch opened a door behind the throne and at the left. Belshazzar disappeared through the doorway, still clasping the dancer in the looseness of his dress.

This was the signal for the dispersion of the company. By other doors, opening in all directions, into recesses of the palace or upon the esplanades, they went, by twos and threes.

The queen tarried longer than any of them. The eunuch, with his spear in rest, had taken his station outside the door which he had closed upon the king and the paramour. Slipping behind a pillar, out of sight of his restless eyes, she fell upon her knees in a storm of weeping, the more deeply bitter because it was soundless. Yet, a little later, as she crossed the room to the opposite end of the dais, her bloodless pain-ridden features had resumed that high composure which was the badge of Chaldee breeding. A maid in waiting parted the curtains at the doorway, and she passed toward her own apartments.

"After to-morrow my pretty one shall miss the royal kiss," Belshazzar said, a little later, as he rolled back upon a hillock of pillows, heaped about a pedestal in the center of his bedchamber. Ista glanced up from the little smoky wine-skin which she was holding over

a goblet. His bleared eyes settled upon her with difficulty. "You wonder why, my pretty one—vision of mine—like the royal caresses? Ah? You had rather stay?"

Her cheeks went bloodless and she shook, but he did not know it. He reached for the goblet, spilled a third of the wine upon his beard as he rocked the rim toward his lips, and dropped it clattering after he swilled down the remainder.

"What is the king's thought?"

"You are going from me, a while."

"Away? Oh, where?"

He laughed. Her alarm amused him. To her the fear that the queen had plotted against her, and won, sprang up like a nightmare.

"Where? Why should the slave girl ask of Majesty where? She goes where Majesty wills. Is it not so?"

"Yes, it is so." There was danger in her face, deep danger, if the king had had eyes to see. He saw only the alert, erect, electric figure, the head high, the eyes bright.

"As I thought. It will be lonely without the king, will it not? Lonely for the slave?"

"Yes, Majesty."

"I thought as much. Now come sit here beside me."

She nestled, stroking the soft thick hands. Her own winked with set stones, in the bluish light.

"Tell me, Gracious One, where is the little girl of the footstool going?"

"Not yet, you must wait, you must wait till morning. Not yet."

"Please, Majesty."

"Not now; sing to me first."

She sang a stanza to the lascivious end, then, in the same voice, put the entreaty: "Where am I going, Majesty?"

"You are going"—he laughed, away deep in his throat—"you are going to Blastus—Spider—sing on."

She caught up the air and sang the song through, then again, more softly. He who ruled half the world was asleep in a heap. She laid her hands upon his face, and smiled, keenly, as she saw that he did not stir. Snatching a robe from a seat, she threw it around her shoulders. Then she stripped from his left forefinger a band of gold, set with one emerald. As she threw open the door the lynx-eyed Gur dropped his spear across the aperture.

She held up the ring and there was triumph in her manner. "Look, you shadow of a man! Do you dream that Ista would come without authority to pass? Down!" She spoke imperiously; the spear handle clinked on the flags, and she went, like a genius of the place, across the darkened throne chamber, on to the south esplanade, and westward.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE NOBLE KADRIC

**A**POSTASY was not unknown among the Magi. Now and again a member of that strange and powerful order, which had the Temple of Belus as its heart, became an outcast. Such a one was Kadric. In the latter days of Nebuchadnezzar he had been called the wisest, though he was among the youngest in all the hierarchy.

It was an old tale on the royal square that, on an afternoon when he had kissed the cup many times, he descended into the streets, in the habiliments of his calling, and wrought miracles which so terrified a fakir, who was entertaining a crowd with simple tricks, that the man swooned and was carried away. This act, the gossip ran, caused the high body of the priesthood to reduce the erring Kadric to the lowest rank. Humiliated, he shed his regalia and lived, thenceforth, in considerable ease, a private citizen known for learning and grace of manners.

Some who knew him whispered that he had lost faith in the gods and denied the truths of astrology, and that these heresies, not the single act of scandal, led to his downfall. Sure it was that now, when the grip of the old faith was fast loosening from the people and had loosened almost wholly from the court, he was a middle-aged, mellow bachelor, secure in favor.

on the square. He roamed there, finding much congenial company and many opportunities for eloquence, no one of which he ever neglected to embrace. The guards, the women, the king himself found him a daily refreshment from the servile usages of the palace. Whatever was occurring or was likely to occur he was more than likely to know. That he was soundly hated by the priests mattered little to court; to Kadric not at all.

As Ista hurried along the esplanade she met this personage, a figure less than average height and gone to seed, as it were, in fat. With his loose and easy robes billowing about him he suggested a huge overfed bird, descended to the earth to try its feet.

"What, Jewel of the Great Crown, out to-night? Bless us, you are a star I did not think to see. How fares the king?"

"Kadric," she laid hold of his forearm in her earnestness, "trouble is hatching."

"Now is it? Oh, this world! How sweet when we shall all go home to Bel and sleep forever, pillowed on his left breast. What is wrong?" He put his head to one side and peered into her face with burlesque solemnity.

"What? Gods, I can not guess. The king is about to send me away. What is at work against me, Kadric? You know, I know you know."

"Send you away! Ho, ho! You that he calls the sparkle in his wine? You that have made him come off his throne for a kiss, before the full court—gods,

how Her Majesty's teeth did come together that night—you? Send you away? Go back to your couch, my sweet twin sister of the moon up yonder; you are sound asleep and the dream is bad."

"Kadric, no. This hour he told me I am to go to Blastus after to-morrow. Why he would not say."

"To the Spider? Devils be about and on him; why should he want you? He has no eyes. As well a blind worm call for a looking-glass. Stay, they are after the Jews again. They hunt them in season, you know. The Spider, I am guessing, has some business of state to do. Gods, be ye merciful to that Jew upon whose trail he sets you."

Ista turned about. "Thanks, Kadric."

"Oh, it is nothing, nothing. Listen; several things told me you were on your way to the Spider's den. How blessed of the Fates to send me here to meet you. I was past the corridor that leads to his toad-crypt a moment ago and I saw two guards go in. Had you sought him to-night it might have meant betrayal."

Her head went up imperiously: "Kadric, you who once wore the robes, prattle not to me of betrayal. Had I gone to the Spider to-night I had seen him, and no guard had ever babbled. Think not that you have done so much." She swept grandly out of his presence.

Unharméd by this rebuff, the like of which he had seen and heard before, he strolled on down the esplanade, looking up at the brilliant stars. At the south-east corner he turned and stood gazing at the summit of the temple, a heavy blot against the sky.



"That blot," he mused, "it seems to cover several systems. But if one stood on a star and looked, how then? Ah, man, woman, devils take us all. Power; we cry for power. The people rule the earth, the priests rule the people, the king rules the priests and a woman rules the king! What a circle is life."

With these profound soliloquies he went down into the city. It was near midnight, an hour at which, ordinarily, the place would have been alive with moving forms and sibilant with music. Now it was dark and still. "The wine becomes too thick for him oftener than it did," the apostate mused as he started southward down an avenue famed for its gaities. Midnight in Babylon was another noon.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE BAIT IS CAST

**T**HE Spider was a name which none called Blastus in his hearing; which every one called him in his absence. His blindness dated from his youth and there was a mystery over it. Half Greek he was known to be. The other half was variously ascribed to gods, demons and men.

In unnatural darkness, a mind which must always have been remarkable in its grasp, became, within limits, a prodigy. A single passion, to surpass in cunning, and a single weakness, to have that cunning praised, made up the misshapen existence. He could cast up astonishing sums in a moment of silent thinking. Whatever demanded reason alone, he could do. Nabonidus had made him captain of the secret guard, and his powers, under the looser reign of Belshazzar, became in effect those of commander-in-chief of all detective operations in the city.

Each day a corps of secret agents, hundreds in number, for the most part unknown even to one another, brought him, verbally, masses of fact. Whatever unusual happening, whatever extraordinary thing, however slight, occurred in Babylon, he demanded to know it. If a boat with a strange design on the prow plied down the Euphrates, he learned of it before it progressed far. If a new shop, with a doubtful pur-

pose, opened its doors, he knew it before the day was done. Out of this mass, with ingenuity unbelievable, he fitted piece to piece, then theory to theory, with results the most astounding.

The arrival of two Jews from Jerusalem, asking for Daniel, or Belteshazzar, came to his ears from the Gate of Lions. The arrival of two Jews, one with gems in lieu of money, at the Inn of Haran, and speaking to the host in Hebrew followed swiftly. Next, that a young Jew had struck a bearer of Ista's litter, and, being questioned, did not know the meaning of the ensign on the palanquin's hood, reached him as a cognate incident. And reasoning from these, he sensed connection between the youth and the Jewish cause—a cause which Babylon did not, probably could not, understand, and conceived to be a bloody plot, solely political.

Little sleep sufficed the Spider. He was up before the sun the second morning after the audience, awaiting the coming of Ista. Once he sent a messenger to ask for her. The slave returned without information. It was mid-forenoon when the favorite, thrilled with expectation not altogether free from fear, was conducted to his presence.

"Fair lady, Majesty lends me your services from this time until a matter of consequence is brought to issue. He has told you?"

"The fact, yes; not the business."

"The business need not be revealed in full. Those

in my service, as they must learn; have one law above all others. Silent obedience."

He paused; she made no reply.

"Why did you spare the young Jew who assaulted your bearer in the street?"

Ista turned the picture of defiance in an instant. Then, remembering that the shapeless thing before her had no eyes, she sneered: "Is that a part of the business, Noble Sir?"

He laughed, a little rasping laugh.

"He did not know the carriage was royal. The bearers ran him down."

"The bearers went unpunished."

"It was an accident."

"Hearken, lady; I do not repeat instructions. This youth gave you the name of the inn at which he lodged. He may be there now. He may not. It is yours to find him, and to bring him to court, at the written invitation of Majesty."

"What is the meaning——?"

The Spider half arose, his lips working uncannily. Then he calmed himself, remembering, perhaps, that she who was before him held in her hands the undoing of many.

"The youth is coming hither for no harm to him. Bring him. The rest you shall know at the right time."

"Is that all?"

"Be not surprised if the innkeeper tell you the

youth is gone, he knows not whither. Ask for some one who *might* know where he is. If you find some one who has seen him, and, disclaiming knowledge of him now, admits that he *might* see him to-night, to-morrow, the next day, leave with that person this scroll. Come then to me. I will direct you further."

The Inn of Haran was thrown into alarm, a little later, when the royal litter drew up and the paramour, dazzling in blue, demanded the owner. Beaded with perspiration, he came in bowing.

"I seek a young Jew, calling himself the son of Levi, who lately arrived from Jerusalem and took lodgings here."

"Oh, noble lady, the man, a dull rustic in truth, did come here, but has taken his few belongings and is gone, whither none here can say. The gods forefend disaster if this my roof, despite our loyalty, has sheltered one distasteful to the crown."

"He has done no wrong. It is a mission of kindness."

At this the proprietor knit his brows and thought deeply. "I recall, fair lady, that he was escorted hence to the shop of the jeweler, Enos, the third square down. That merchant might have later trace of him."

The jeweler, in his turn, was equally alarmed. In response to the inquiry his eyes became mere slits: "A youth of some such markings did stop here, good lady, but he went hence quickly. Where he now is I could not tell were God to ask."

"Might he, by any chance, come here again?"

"I could not say; I dare not guess. It might be, lady; this is Babylon."

"I leave for him this message. If he come, or if the opportunity arise to send it to his hand, do so."

"The will of Majesty shall be," said Enos, as he received the scroll.

When Ista related these transactions to the Spider he chuckled inwardly. "Go to the same place tomorrow at the same hour. You were in his footsteps."

Daniel was walking in his tiny parlor, his hands clasped behind his back and his head bending when Enos burst in and thrust the scroll before his eyes. "Patriarch, we are undone. She came but now, the witch, the nymph, the she-devil Ista. In her litter she came, asking for the young man Ariel. She left this!"

Daniel had paused in his meditative walk. He seemed to be looking afar through the walls.

"She besought me, to know if I could lead her to the youth, oh, Daniel; she, who is named for the foul moon-goddess. Discreetly, I answered that I knew not where he was. In truth I did not know. My order was to deliver this to the young man, if I could. Say not that we are not spied upon and girt about with enemies!"

Daniel turned in from the little window: "Good friend, compose thyself and be glad. The Lord God hath sent us a man. I had not ceased to believe that He would." Enos did not at once grasp the meaning.

"Where can he be hidden? They must not find him."

"He shall not be hidden," said Daniel gently; "he shall go to the palace."

"To the palace, he? To the tortures, thou meanest!"

"Not to that, I trust. The king, I feel, hath other things in mind, perhaps almost as bad. Yet, out of the west this young Jew came to me, as it was in my dream. It can not be otherwise. Pure he came, from the beloved land. Pure he shall go, into the cauldron. What befalls him there will be the will of Almighty. Did He ever that which was not well?"

"What shall I do with the scroll?"

"Give it me."

Then Enos, upon whom the idea dawned slowly, as through a mist, went away, perplexed, yet somehow comforted. Daniel sat, turning the linen back and forth in his hands. Then he knelt beside his chair, his face uplifted, and his lips moved.

One seeing him thus would have seen lines deeper than were in his cheeks an hour before. The mouth was more grave, yet one might have thought the tenderness of its intelligence enriched. Nor might the closest observer, watching the lips as they moved, have guessed any word they formed. He put the scroll in the breast of his gown and went down into the garden.

Ariel was sitting under a trellis with the old physician, hearing of how the Babylonians were skilled in all manner of poisons. The patriarch came along the little shell-lined path. The youth was up to greet him.

"Nahum, excuse the young man, if thou wilt. I have something to say to him, privily." When they

were alone Daniel took the strong young hands in his own: "Ariel, a task hath come for thee, if thou art willing. It is a task of many dangers."

"Oh, father, let me try; I beseech thee, let me try."

"I like thy spirit, nephew of my friend. I, too, was young, once. I have not forgotten. Wouldst be willing to go to the court of the king?"

"To court, oh, wonderful; is it true? How was it planned?"

"Ista, she whose litter ran upon thee at the crossing, sendeth a scroll. I think it is an invitation; and a royal invitation, thou knowest, is a command also. Break the wax and read it."

Within was a little mass of cuneiform, written close and fine. Ariel had no knowledge of the writing.

"Shall I read it? Listen:

"Belshazzar, King Regnant of Babylon; to Ariel, Son of Levi:

"Having word of arrival in his capital of Ariel, son of Levi, late of Jerusalem, Belshazzar, son of the royal Nabonidus, regent of Babylon and heir of Babylonia, requires the immediate presence of the son of Levi at his court, that he may speak to the king concerning the subject peoples in the West. It is the will of His Majesty that, from this time, the son of Levi dispose himself as a guest of the Crown. The scroll shall be a sign to the royal guards.'"

The trail of the royal cylinder ran below, in a smear of red wax.



“What thinkest thou, Ariel?”

The young face was afire with eagerness. “It is a sign, oh, Daniel; a sign that God hath need of me. Oh, I will go, I will go, and whatever danger I meet I will overcome it——”

“Then I will leave thee, not to disturb thy preparations. I may not return before the dawn to-morrow.” He moved toward the door.

“But tell me how I shall attire myself, and what I shall say at the palace doors, and when I meet the king, and—yes, what shall I do when I am in the palace—for the Cause?”

Daniel’s countenance became a slow radiant smile as he pointed a tapering forefinger upward: “God can hear thee; talk first with Him.” So saying, he went out softly.

It was the first time Ariel really had been left alone in the capital. The house was silent, and he could distinguish no particular sound abroad, yet the air was thick with a low sullen roar, the blent confusion of many thousands, of voices, of wheels, of forges, of moving feet. He sat, holding the scroll. He, Ariel, to be the guest of Majesty! Why? And why was the patriarch willing? The court was a cesspool; every one knew it. He thought of his aged uncle, and of Bilhan and of Kallai, but more than of these he thought of Kallai’s Rose, his Rose; ah, if she knew what honor was falling upon him! In a sudden flood of pity for her, in the far-off desolation of her little home, he clasped his hands over his breast and breathed a vow:

"My Rose, mine own, I am God's, and thine. I go into the lion's mouth, but I shall come out unscathed, for thee!"

Then, from the deeps of his absolute faith, he delivered up prayers. He shut himself in, and, in the ardor of his supplication, believed that God drew near to him, yet, strangely, withheld from him the answer to his cries. The afternoon wore out as he pondered the riddle from angle after angle. When his early bedtime came he still was thinking, and wondering. When he slept he dreamed a familiar dream, one which had sometimes swam across his rest even before he knew of his father's will. But now, when he awakened, he took it as a revelation. He had dreamed that he saw another Jerusalem, rebuilt of pure white stone. A reason for his going to the king came to him, with the force of prophecy.

Before the sun was up he dipped himself refreshingly in the shrub-bound pool far back in the garden. Then he put on his costliest linen. He had no more than done this when the patriarch returned, as he had said that he might. He found a youth, of commanding mien, attired almost too richly, even for Babylon. A glance at the quiet air of resolution was answer enough to his question:

"So thou hast asked the reason of thy going, and hast understood?"

"I asked, and God answered, and I know. The king would make me a spy upon my people: Jehovah hath ordained that I shall be a spy upon the king."

“It may be that He hath revealed it, Ariel.” The patriarch came close up and dropped his arms about the broad shoulders: “Thou goest between the jackal’s teeth, beloved. A word at parting: Jehovah hath lifted up His voice, through the prophets, against this city. In the right time, His voice shall be lifted *in the flesh*, and the walls shall be rent, and the Lady of Empires shall pass from the earth, like an evil vision from the mind. His voice shall be lifted in the flesh, I say! Keep thyself strong, dear one. *It might be lifted in thee.* Keep thyself strong! Now go to him who thinks the gods are his bondservants. I, Daniel, bless thee.”

## CHAPTER XVI

### SIGNS HIGH AND LOW

THE Temple of Belus was a conical mountain of sun-dried brick, belted from base to crown with a narrow staircase. Rows of little windows, piercing its mass, admitted the winds to the forbidden chambers away within. Dark gray, sullen, enormous in bulk and awful in singularity, it stood, the monument of that moribund philosophy which its tenants served with less than the zeal of their predecessors of the days of Saracus and of Nebopolassar.

From the flat roof of its upper shrine, the rivers might be seen, two ribbons of silver, stretched side by side. From it Borsippa lay like a map, with its web-work of canals in all directions. From it the dull yellowish border of the desert to the westward cast up the sheen of the destroying sun. To the east the hills, the wall of the valley, stood like low clouds. Also, it gave to its bearded votaries a matchless view of the heavens.

On the night in which the son of Levi wrestled with the meaning of his invitation to the palace, a single figure occupied this elevation. Leaning far back, in a rigid chair, he looked at the East, so fixedly that he might have been a part of the architecture. Half an hour went, then he raised a tiny tablet of soft clay and, with an instrument like a stylus, traced some char-

acters upon it. Another half-hour and he wrote again, by such light as the stars shed. A third, but a shorter period, then he stood up, surveyed the cloudless vault, and made a last notation. Then he went noiselessly to the head of the stair and began, as noiselessly, to descend. At the same moment the moon's rim lifted from the other side of Asia, dulling the light of the stars.

The descent was a task, even for a vigorous man in his prime. This one paused more than once, to breathe, as he made his way to the pavement at the base. A little way around the huge ellipse he rapped on a narrow door. It opened and he went in, meeting no one. Down steps, dim in a bluish light, he passed to a corridor, leading to another door, so tall and so heavily carved as to indicate a chamber of consequence. A black slave, clad in a mere ribbon, dark as his skin, stood guard, stiff as the walls.

"Is she within?"

"Yes, Holy One; she came but now."

He passed on, into an unearthly room. Two winged lions, of pure black marble, stood at the left hand, their heads against the ceiling, staring into the faces of two winged bulls, equally huge, which stood on the south. Between the first pair of images a space, no more than wide enough for two persons to pass abreast, without brushing the stony knees, stood open. In the center, under the heads of the four, the space widened. There stood a woman, all in black. A veil concealed her face. As the door closed she drew it away, dis-

closing a countenance furtive and bloodless, yet touched by a determination which struck through every sunken line. It was a face which nature had meant to be beautiful; which once had been so. Stretching his hands above his head the priest bent low.

"I am here, oh, Queen."

"What say the stars; is it good or bad? I can bear evil. What do they say?"

"Oh, Majesty, I will read from the tablets as I spelled it out from the astral scroll."

"Tell me. I know nothing of your wisdom; what is coming?"

"Majesty, I can not. Read it all, who can? There shall be trouble, oh, Queen. This I read clearly. There shall be strife, stealth, the bursting of doors, then bloodshed. It is not at hand, but it is near."

"And what of the king?"

"The king's star glitters, then loses itself in haze. Again and again it does so. By the star of her of whom you asked, I see that she shall not possess him."

"She shall not possess him!"

"She shall not possess him. How it shall be with her, in other things, and with you, oh, Queen, I can not divine."

"And why?"

"The queen's star, too, glitters and is dim by turns. Beyond this I can tell you nothing."

"Thanks, Arbec; when the queen's power, such as she has, can help you, let the queen know. I must return."

He walked before her, out of the chamber, to the extreme west end of the gallery, and down a flight of steps to the mouth of a passage. Far through it the flicker of a lamp shone, through a haze of vapor. There he left her, and she went to the light, over a floor of flags. She shuddered as she went, for a dull continual roaring sounded overhead, and the vault of the roof was beaded with damp. The tunnel ran beneath the river, joining palace and temple by a way always forbidden to all but royalty, and now in utter disuse, for the royal masons had said that the roof was slipping, and that a footfall might collapse it. On the palace side, the queen emerged in a marble grotto, opening behind a plinth. As she ascended the stair to the esplanade two figures approached along the railing. She shrank, but drew her veil more closely about her face and advanced boldly, passing within the length of two spears of the couple. Then she hurried on to her own apartments.

He who was nearer her as she passed, turned to the girl who clung to his forearm :

“Does my little lily know whom we met, just now?”

“No, Kadric, tell me please.”

“Does the lily know where she had been?”

“No; why will you tease me and make me angry? Tell me?”

“Or why she had been there, Little Blossom on the Tide’s Cheek?”

“No, tell me this instant, or I shall leave you, Noble

Tormentor, and go back to the throne room alone. There," she pattered on, in mock vexation, "I shall find some kind lord, who will remember that I am terrible in my anger." She gripped his arm as she said it.

The ex-priest drew the small hand more firmly into his own: "She was a lady; she had been to the stars. She went to learn what they could not tell her, but I could. If you remember what I just said—which you do not—it was that the wise are foolish always, while the foolish are wise only at times. You, Little Breath of Myrrh, you are sweet to talk to and to sing to a man and hold his hands, even his head. It is enough. Be not unwise; leave thought alone. It is the occupation of asses. It wastes the time the gods intended the like of you to use in the making of love. Now, look at the moon. The moon; Love, is herself in love to-night. See how she glows. I hope her spouse is waiting, just over the edge of the world. Come, we will slip into the grotto in the east arch of the first terrace, and some one will carry us a tun or two of the best blood of the vine, and you shall hold my weary head against your girdle and trill me that naughty little ballad about the nymphs and the bridegroom."

The queen lost not a moment in her own suite. She hurried to the throne room. It was a tumult of singing and dancing. The court was in blossom to-night. Ladies, in the narrow skirts and half corsages of the fashion, made the room a sea of color. Lords, in their



long robes, promenaded from end to end of the place, their breasts crossed and recrossed by sashes, afire with gems.

The soul of the Old East was upon the scene. The women were scores upon scores in number, flitting or dancing or being half carried about in the swirl—dark, flashy, voluptuous creatures, rich in that sensuous beauty which wears full lips and deep bosoms and rounded limbs. They laughed at world-old jests of brides and of husbands and joined fearlessly in clattering songs which ran forever to the theme of the Goddess Ishtar and her ten thousand loves. The tight skirts gave the eye the contour of the nether limbs and the corsages, leaving the left shoulder and breast uncovered, were supplemented, more for fashion than from shame, by little fans, which those less bold than others, held spread across their bosoms. Agreeing in their general style, the costumes agreed in nothing else. There moved a belle in gleaming black, with a chain of pearls about her white throat, and a diadem of the same gems bound across her wide low brow. And there the bride of a merchant prince, rejoicing to railery of the broadest stamp, was a vision of glinting blue, and a blaze of diamonds. Yonder a matron, clinging to youth, her skin still clear, yet touched with the wand of age, a flame of the reddest red, and forgetting, all too often, to keep her fan of plaited feathers in its place. And yonder, emerging from behind a pillar, looking up into the square powerful face of a captain of the royal bodyguard, a girl, not more than

seventeen, in yellow sandals and a soft white gown, a girdle of opals about her waist and a gleam of mischief in her eyes.

Her partner was more lithe than massive; so dark that his skin was deeper than olive in tinge. Against the light his forehead had the shade of dull brass. His shiny black hair was caught in a fillet at the back of his neck. A light brown, sleeveless tunic, setting close to breast and waist, came down over his loins and ended in a fringe of thread of gold. The thighs, the knees and the bulging calves, down to the wound sandal thongs, were bare. Between his shoulders, on a little cord, was suspended his cloak, to be folded and gathered under his arm, or spread over shoulders and caught about the whole frame, at will. Now he spread it, and tossed its edge about the girl, to shield her from the crowd's eyes, while she yielded to his plea—a kiss, on the dimple of her right shoulder, at its meeting with the arm.

Among the men, as among the women, jewels ran to a riot which was redeemed from utter barbarity only by a pretty harmony of matching.

They walked, arm in arm, they drank, they sang, these scions of the capital of the world. They wandered into the dim spaces under the balconies, and forth again. While one could be seen who was strictly sober, four or five would pass, undeniably touched with the red wine.

Belshazzar lolled on his throne in the uncertain good humor of half intoxication. A boy stood by to

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replenish the royal flagon, and his post was not an idle one. Under the balconies musicians were bending over little drums, harps, psaltries and reeds, all swelling through old Accadian airs and swifter, galloping dance-tunes, sometimes set to words which the musicians themselves chanted as they played.

The queen was smiling as she entered, but she was ill at ease. She went quietly to her place by the throne, thinking to reach it unobserved. Belshazzar saw her:

“Where have you been, my love?”

“I only returned to my rooms, oh, Majesty, to rearrange my hair. See, it is in the double coil, and billowed up from the brows, in the fashion which the king was gracious enough to praise, four nights ago. Is it not thus that he likes it best?”

“Yes, but so long, why away so long? Ah, was it the tiring maids?”

Her breath came sharply and she hesitated.

“Ho, Gur, Galon, here!” The great eunuch and another, only a little less gigantic, touched their foreheads upon the step. “To Her Majesty’s chambers, and bring in her maidens.”

“Majesty, oh, spare them, I pray it. They did their best. It was I who was slow.”

“Spare! They shall not be spared. Shall maids keep Majesty waiting on Majesty and escape? I am Belshazzar!”

Those nearest the dais hushed their voices. They foresaw a royal jest, which usually was something grim. The eunuchs, each holding the arm of a pretty,

girl, reappeared. The prisoners, their dark eyes starting with terror, trembled, looking at the queen, and clasped their hands for mercy. The king lifted his palms, for silence. Softly, from every part of the room, the crowd massed in.

“Hearken, citizens of Babylon, subjects of the king”—he reeled a little as he stood up—“shall evil go unrequited among us?”

“Nay, never,” came from a hundred throats, while courtier looked at lady, and lord at Majesty, wondering what was about to befall.

“Look, then, and see that Belshazzar can be both merciful and just. These two have kept the queen waiting long from the majestic side. What punishment is equal to sloth such as this? What but the lash?”

A slave carried to the king a thick round whip with a handle of worked silver. The queen shuddered. The girls were sobbing as they watched the royal hand.

“Look you, good friends, shall the king’s laws be upheld?”

“Aye, surely.”

Then to the eunuchs he cried out:

“Strip them.”

Rid of every vestige of garment, half swooning, their arms twined helplessly about each other, the soft creatures crouched, awaiting the workings of the whim. His dull eyes danced as he stood over them, and the lash cut hissing circles in the air. The court crowd held its breath. Then he laughed, and threw the lash

away over the heads of the watching throng, leering down at the victims:

"To smite flesh so fair to look upon, nay, let my crown be broken and my kingdom overthrown before I do it. Wenches, your nakedness saves you. Gather your garments and go, and remember the mercies of Belshazzar."

The queen looked into his face, and her eyes were wet, and with tears of unfeigned gratitude. There was a burst of applause as the court saw that the whole proceeding was merely so much acting on the part of Majesty. The musicians bent to their work again and the hundreds grew movable and talkative as they were before.

Just then the noble Kadric, with his Babylonian lily still upon his arm, appeared at one of the entrances. Half a dozen voices called out in chorus: "Kadric, the sage, the wise one, has been abroad with a damsel. Oh, King, what scandal is this! We caught them returning, oh, Majesty!"

With much good natured ado and mock severity the ex-priest and the girl were surrounded and thrust forward. Neither seemed much embarrassed. The king looked down and, with a hiccough, called for silence. Vexation then shone through the full blown face of the noble. He had known such jests to end unpleasantly.

"Kadric has been from the palace, and with a woman? Is it so?"

"Oh, Majesty, if I must run after folly I choose

to do so outside the royal room. In that I differ from those about me, who do not so much respect the chastity of the king's mind. I am guilty."

"The sentence, the sentence," cried the crowd, unwilling to admit the jest reversed.

"I sentence Kadric, the sage, to drink a whole skin of wine this night."

Shouting, laughter and the bringing in of a full wine-skin closed the incident, typical of that stripe of merriment which beguiled the nights for the greatest throne on earth.

The more bibulous of the company began to sink upon cushions about the pillars, or unsteadily to disappear, often with a slave or two to guide the careless feet. The delicious coolness of midnight was succeeded by actual chill. Cocks were crowing over beyond the river and the first prophecy of dawn was in the east when Belshazzar, who had sat motionless and staring for several moments, lurched forward and let fall his head upon his arms. Immediately the music hushed. The queen commanded four stout slaves, and they took up the senseless burden and carried him, as men carried the dead, and laid him in the queen's own room. There, with a devotion unknown except to the utmost love, she composed the figure to its rest, and herself sat by to await the awakening and to minister to its miseries.

The noble Kadric looked about him thoughtfully; saw the men and the women who, some hours before, were bright and buoyant, now staggering, or lying prone, or sitting stupidly and staring about them.

"Every navel bulges like the eye of a frog; every toe is tripped; vomiting next, and three-cornered eyes in the morning. By the bull's wings, this place is not for the philosopher; this is the place for slaves, with buckets and besoms and scrubbing cloths. Good night, my flower of all the flowers, good night." He kissed her once, on each cheek, and again in the mouth—recalling suddenly that the gods loved trinities. Then, taking within him an ample part, though less than the whole of the wine to which he had been condemned, he went out on the southern esplanade, alone, and stood there, filling his breast with the cool air. Looking up at the waning stars of midnight, he said, in a whisper: "How far, oh ye or that, which madest the world—how far—will ye let our madness run!"

When Her Majesty went into the tunnel from the Temple of Belus, to rejoin the revel in the palace, the priest who had counseled her went back to the audience room, and stood for a little time, his eyes closed and his body as motionless as the legs of the stone beasts towering around him. Then he went noiselessly to the intersection of the corridor and pressed upon a brick, seemingly as snug in its place as any. It turned inward like a hinged door. Reaching into the tiny recess, he twitched at a dependent cord. Soon another priest, younger than he, but bearded and robed the same, appeared.

"The summons was heard, oh, brother."

"Bring the tablets, Akkad, and come with me. I like not the look of the heavens this night. I told it

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not to the queen, but there is a threat against the kingdom. A new star, like a ruby, unnamed in any chart, is driving all the host of both hemispheres before it."

The last of the revelers was gone from the palace before the two astrologers arose from their vigil on the temple summit. They stood, looking into each other's faces. Arbec spoke:

"The omen grows worse. You saw it change?"

Akkad nodded.

"Is this thing buried in your heart, as it is in mine?"

The other nodded again. They began the descent together.



## CHAPTER XVII

### ABOUT THE CEDAR CHAIR

**I**T WAS about midday when Ariel, clasping the king's scroll in the bosom of his robes, climbed the broad middle flight of the palace steps to the southern esplanade. Two soldiers were stationed in the shadow of the haunches of the winged lions which guarded its top. Because of the heat, they had removed their helmets, and they did not trouble to put them on as the stranger came up.

"Whom do you seek?" the older and leaner of the men asked curtly.

"Belshazzar, the king."

The soldier opened his eyes: "A Jew, and you seek the king?"

"A Jew, and the king seeks me, thou son of Babylon. Your eyes should know this sign"—he unrolled the scroll, conscious of a great and very human delight in doing so. The guards put on their helmets quickly; their spear handles crashed against the stone and they faced forward, rigid.

"Pass."

The son of Levi had imagined the king's house surrounded with more formality, and greater courtesy. Upon the esplanade he stood, staring at the innumerable doors before him. Some of them were open. He knew nothing at all of the arrangement of the build-

ing, so he went to the nearest opening, lured there by a glimpse of the gorgeous decoration of the wall immediately inside. By chance, it was an antechamber, giving directly into the throne room. Into this the Jew blundered, not guessing where he went. It was deserted.

Standing below the dais, spanning the dimensions above and around him, frowned upon by the stone elephants' heads, which, looking down from their capitals, seemed alive and challenging his intrusion, he was brought to a standstill in pure awe.

A wide purple canopy was suspended from its four corners, high above the throne. A wilting wreath of blue and white blossoms hung over one cedar arm, and the air was oversweet with perfumes, all strange to his nostrils.

The wall, here at his right hand and all about the chamber, was a multitude of bas-reliefs, so bold, in contrast to the dull dark marble above and below them that, in the softened light, they seemed like posing groups of players. Towering here, above his shoulder, stood the king, in effigy, his foot on the neck of a lion, transfixed with a spear; his hand on the reins of his hunting team. Ariel passed on. The next group pictured Majesty home from the hunt, surrounded by his women, who fought to clasp his knees. The third group was all massed nakedness, a study in regal love. And as he followed the line of the wall, passing picture after picture, each a part of a panorama of an ideal day, his soul sickened to revolt. For every vice of a

libidinous race was here glorified in bald heavy chiseling, not with any sense of humor, not, seemingly, upon any prompting of religion, but with mad fervor for its own sake.

He was turning back to the door of the anteroom when a pair of sandals tinkled, over on the farther side, and a sweet voice called through the hush:

"My Jew, Son of Levi, come to me! Welcome to the house of Majesty."

Ariel stopped and half-turned toward the sound. He was embarrassed at meeting her at all; doubly embarrassed that the meeting should be here. The flush on his face was plain, even in that light. The woman came near, walking noiselessly, on the very tips of her little sandals. She clapped her hands:

"That is the way you looked when you came to the pole of my litter, after you struck my bearer"—she laughed, a merry peal—"so pink, they are flowers, your cheeks are. What has made the king's guest blush?"

Greatly as the son of Levi loved his race, he would have loved it more had he known how many centuries in advance of the rest of the world it was in its regard for common purity. He responded, out of a quick conscience:

"If my face is red, oh, lady, it is for shame. I do not like this chamber."

Her head was tilted. Now the place echoed her laugh. "No? Pardon the poor little Ista: she thought the son of Levi was a man."

Ariel retraced the step he had taken toward the door. There was a hot speech, right at his lips, but—this was Belshazzar's house, and this was Belshazzar's woman. Thereupon he calmly told his first lie:

"Lady Ista, did I jest too deeply? Pardon, I pray, for my clumsiness. When you came I was just beginning to gaze about this beautiful place. I dared not ask you to explain to me the symbolism——"

"Dared not? Ah, my Jew must know that it is in his power to command me. Come," she looped her arm through his and led him forward. "I will show you every beauty in the place. Not one shall escape us. His Majesty is up in the gardens now. He will not come down till after sunset. The hours are long, but they shall be short to you and me, just you and me——" She clasped the brown of his arm, and the touch was like fire against the skin. She pointed out the moon-goddess, Ishtar, whose namesake she was, the center of a group of amorous deities in the middle of the south side. Ariel looked, and heard her voice running on, but his vision spanned the desert, and he saw the beauty of another face, and heard the sound of another voice, and he said, in the silence of his mind, "My Rose, mine own; all Babylon is not worth one kiss of thine."

But ah, here was the great reeking heart of the capital of the world. And this poor being at his side, a heathen, for whom Hell even now was heating, was it sin for him to go a little way with her, to look about him, and to see with his own eyes how richly these

things merited the nearing wrath! A babble of low tones poured into his ears. Her voice was not like Nana's, neither so strong nor so rich, he thought; still, it was a voice which made one listen. She led him from corner to corner, into the galleries, and at last upon the dais itself, and before the cedar chair, encrusted with a wealth which made the little horde which Heman had removed from the mortise seem a trifle in comparison. Ista glanced all around quickly, and there was a devil in each of her eyes:

"Sit down," she whispered.

He dropped into the throne and spread his elbows upon the arms.

"Up," she hissed, and he stood, startled at the sudden insistence of the order. Her laugh broke out again.

"You, Son of Levi, you have sat on the throne. If Belshazzar knew it——"

"What then?"

"What then? Another Jew would leave this world, so quickly that even his God would be surprised. Forget that you ever touched the chair. I never should have asked you." They went down the steps and toward the eastern doors. The woman fascinated by her very incongruities.

"If the king knew, and knew also that you were—to blame——" began Ariel.

"I to blame!" She was surprise personified. "I was not to blame. You sat on the throne, not I."

"You asked me to; I had no thought of wrong."

"But you must learn. Besides, if I had done it, I should go to the king, and kiss both sides of his beard, and hold his hands while I told him a riddle. That would be all. You, you could only die. Forget it all."

They were now upon the eastern esplanade and she called a slave and sent him away again. He brought a platter, corded with wafers and heaped with fruit. A pitcher and two goblets stood in the center.

"Come inside again; there is a little nook in the corner behind the last pillar on the north."

"Why not sit here? I like to see the river, and the gates—how they gleam! They might be gold."

"Not now; a little later."

They followed the slave and the tray, and found the little alcove, a leathern nest scarcely wide enough for the two of them. She poured the wine herself, and they drank. Then she refilled the goblets, presenting him the one which she had held.

"Drink from my goblet, and let me drink from yours."

Ariel took but a sup of the second pouring, for it was the red wine of scriptures, strong to intoxication. The first draught ran through his blood like fire.

"So little? No, my young giant shall drink as a young giant should. See——" She held the rim to his lips, and, in the movement, pressed against him, lightly, yet not so lightly but that he knew of the contact. He drank, and leaned back in the pillowed niche, and laughed; for the son of Levi was a man, and young;

and she who was with him was a woman, and her beauty had cost some men their lives.

A eunuch shuffled in at the nearest door. His light ungainly figure and reptilian eyes put him to utter degradation in that noble hall. He looked at the nook, one look, then he turned, as one turns who runs, suddenly, upon an enemy he does not wish to meet. Outside again, he hugged up his thin shoulders in disgust and took his way to the Spider's den. The Spider was waiting:

"What position did you find them in?"

"They are seated, close together, on a divan behind the pillars. Fruits and wine are before them."

"Did they speak?"

"As I entered I heard the woman saying, 'My young giant shall drink as a young giant should.'"

"It is enough. Depart."

At either side of his chair his slave girls stood, plying their fans of plumes. The blind man sat, his head bent, his frame absolutely motionless. Believing that he had fallen asleep, as he often did, in little naps, like a wild creature, their tired arms began, very gradually, to slacken the motion of the fans. Suddenly he raised his head, his eyesockets opened and his jaws snapped. Then he said, in his sibilant, penetrating hiss: "Fan on, you sluts, can your master not think but that you believe he sleeps! Fan on! Hist, boy!"

A small boy, in the red half-tunic of a court page, darted from his stool, in a corner, and answered, tremblingly,

"You know him who is called Kadric, the ex-priest?"

"I do, Lord."

"Go to the gardens, and find him, and say that, if it be to his noble convenience, Blastus would see him, here and now."

The boy hurried out, and round the palace, and up to that giant tier of floors, upheld by arches, which Nebuchadnezzar had made for his Median queen. Whoever was sent there to find any one deserved unlimited time. The whole heap sloped to a blunt apex, overtopping the roof of the palace on the south. Each terrace was wider by fifteen paces than the next above it, and every one was boxed with masonry and filled with earth. Ferns, flowers of all varieties and even palms and fruit trees grew here, in the unnatural richness of the soil, and watered by fountains, blowing spray over every stage. At close range, the appearance was that of a hill, honeycombed with little caverns, arched at the mouths. Here the minions gathered, afternoons and evenings. Here the music began at the midday. No one ever saw the gardens crowded. The chambers were too many and too deep.

The page sought long, peeping into arch after arch and surprising group after group of loungers, many of them come out to the coolness for their last nap, before he found the man he sought.

Kadric was in a recess under the eaves of the third stage, nursing a jorum of drink and reading from a scroll of linen, uncurled upon his knee. The serving



girl stood near. He completed his reading as the boy stepped in, and his speech was to the girl:

"There is no answer, Little Petal of Rose Bloom. Run away now, unless you might come here and give me the littlest, littlest nothing of a kiss? No? Ah, those eyes do twinkle like new-coined stars. I will remember your heartlessness. You shall repay: I say it freely." She skipped away, and the page delivered his message.

The brows of the ex-priest knit in hard folds. Every mortal in Babylon feared the Spider; even the king. He held such things in his head as could damn one-half the court, at least, and summons to his lair might be the beginning of anything—or the end. Hastily reviewing such of his recent acts as he remembered, the noble found a deal to criticize, but little which seemed to him deeply dangerous. Nevertheless his mind was restless.

"Say to the wise Blastus that I will wait upon him immediately."

The page had hardly returned to his stool, in the corner, after delivering this reply to his master, when the noble was admitted. Blastus spoke, without lifting his head:

"Noble Kadric, you answer summons promptly."

"I was about to come past your door, my Blastus; the summons was not the least of inconvenience."

The Spider did not miss the deeply covered point of this reply. Neither had the noble Kadric missed it in the Spider's implication that he was amen-

able to summons. The empty lids fluttered and closed more tightly:

"Business of state is in the doing, oh, Kadric. Your popularity about the square is said to be a proverb. There is a service which may require it all. You pledge it, for the Crown?"

"For the Crown? Assuredly. Command me."

"A young Jew, green from Jerusalem, was admitted to court this day, for a single purpose. We have it that he knows of certain restless movements among the people of his race. The Lady Ista has him in her charge. Upon the surface he is not a prisoner but a guest. His name is Ariel."

"And the Lady Ista is to learn from him——?"

"The Lady Ista has him in her charge, and she, like you, is in the service of the king, and under direction of myself. The rest has not to do with the service I have in mind for the noble Kadric."

"Your pardon."

The Spider spoke on, evenly, giving no heed to the interpolation:

"There is a danger in the way of the purpose. Women, as the noble Kadric must have learned, are weak and vacillating."

Kadric lifted his hands: "The gods be blessed forever that it is so. Were it not, how sadly would the joys of the world decrease!"

"The Lady Ista, it may be, is not unlike the rest of them. It will be a part of her business, shortly, to inflame the Jew's love. But she herself must remain

unstung by the arrows of her namesake. There must be no error in that. It is half your work."

"Gods, sir, from the depths of your cunning you have contrived the worst imaginable task. Bid me to hush the evening wind, or to start the river flowing back upon itself; but to keep a woman from falling in love with a man—that is business for a god, and a grown one. What is the other half?"

"The Lady Ista, as you know perfectly, is the very breath of life to the royal fancy. I have the order of Majesty for the unincumbered service of the lady, while the Jew is here. The order must stand. In brief, the king must put her from him for the time, and leave her, and the Jew, to me. That is the other half."

"Surely the wise Blastus overrates my skill, to choose me to a bit of diplomacy so pregnant with peril!"

"It may be. If so, I have erred. If not; if you accomplish these things, then it may be that peculiar favors shall flow toward you, as if by accident."

The noble arose, to take his leave. The Spider stopped him:

"As you are here, a word more, and upon a matter which, with all that has passed between us, must be sealed up within you."

"Most certainly."

"You know, do you not, the arrangement of the chambers in the Temple of Belus?"

"It is a long and happy time since I set sandals on holy and stinking spaces, oh, sir, but unless

improbable changes have been made I could find my way about it through pitch darkness."

"Then where is the treasury, and what is the style of it?"

"The treasury?" Kadric gave the questioner a look of keen suspicion. "It is on the east side, directly behind the audience chamber. It has no window. The one door opens straight through the farther end of the chamber to the west."

"How much, and of what kind is that treasure which was brought out of Jerusalem at the time of the sack?"

"A matter of ten or eleven chariot loads; trenchers of silver and gold, and chargers of brass, and basins of unset gems. Candlesticks, too, and cups without number, and numerous plates and bowls, of some religious use or other, are parts of it."

"Would you say that the chamber is perfectly safe from assault?"

"Perfectly."

"That is all."

While these incidents were taking place, and the afternoon was softening into the dusk, the son of Levi and the Lady Ista, interrupted no more after the eunuch turned away from them in their seat behind the pillar, kept together. Out on the eastern esplanade, in the thick shadow which the building let fall across the city, away from the reddening sun, they sat looking down upon the stream. It was deserted, except that here and there a tiny boat, with a fisherman poised

astern, spear in hand, hung on the flank of the current. A plinth, with a vine overrunning a bowl above it, was at their backs. Two slaves, who had brought them milk and sweetmeats a moment before, now left them.

As the shadow of the palace lengthened, the water, above and below them, began to have another look. Out from the quays came little shallows, so light that they seemed to touch the surface only as a swallow dips his wings. Larger boats, sometimes open, sometimes rigged with gaudy canopies, drifted on the current or, plied by a single oarsman, moved leisurely up or down. In them were women, sometimes attended by men, sometimes by children, often by slaves. The boats were of a thousand colors and of patterns innumerable. Their rostra, carved into dragons or angels or gods, half-human, half-beast, peopled the channel as with the folk of a dream. Among them were some which proved that the phallic worship still had votaries. Laughter arose on all sides; with it music. The boats increased until it seemed that the stream could not uphold them all. The city was awakening to its social day.

"Yonder, is that not pretty!" Ista clasped the Jew's arm and pointed up the stream. Two canopied boats, each with one passenger and an oarsman, came riding side by side. The skins of the black rowers gleamed like oil. Urged forward, they bent to their work and their arms kneaded and knotted. In one boat sat a girl, cool, elegant, crowned with a wreath

of flowers and nowise embarrassed by the comment her boat was causing. In the other, almost within arm's reach, rode a young man. He wore his chaplet like a prince; his robe was dazzling white, and he, too, smiled, as he spoke to his slave. Other pleasure seekers, seeing that a race was intended, steered aside and gave the two the center of the stream. As they were opposite the plinth the girl's boat gained, by the breadth of its prow. Ista clapped her hands. Down below them a hundred yards was the Bridge of Babylon.

"They race for the bridge," cried Ista. She sprang up, Ariel with her, and they ran, hoping to see the finish. Then the girl's rower, inspired by what promise or threat no one might guess, doubled his strength, and his boat shot so far ahead of the other that the crowds, on either side, burst into derisive cries. The victor fluttered a yellow ribbon from her upthrown hand as she sped under the middle span of the bridge. Already the dandified loser of the little contest had turned aside and was out of sight among the swarm.

"As the night comes the crowds will swell," Ista was saying. "Before it is a fourth gone you can hardly see the water. The lanterns, red and green and blue and starry white, will shine from every prow, and there will be songs from every one, and the royal diving girls will try for prizes from the platform, there by the side of the bridge. Oh, it will be worth coming from Jerusalem to see."

Ariel was sitting motionless, looking away down

the thickening stream. The growl of Babylon was in his ears. The sadness which comes on the wings of twilight was tugging at his heart, and pointing away to the westward, to a shattered city, piteously poor, and a group of hills which had been the solemn companions of his childhood. And it came to him, all in one thought: "I will go back: I will leave this proud monster to God Himself, and return to the woman He made for me. We two shall serve Him, there, all our days, and when His will is worked and His people are delivered, they shall find a city prepared for their coming—but what did the Patriarch Daniel say at parting? 'Keep thyself strong!' Would that be strong? No, no. Oh, Nana, if I could be with thee, only for one hour!"

"Now tell me," Ista was repeating, "what does the young Jew think of the old city of the Gentiles?"

"I was not thinking of the city, Lady Ista; I was thinking of another place; a place where it is very quiet, and the sheep are driven into the fold at sundown, and the shepherd's day is done." His voice quavered on the last word and he turned his face away.

The paramour turned in the seat by his side and laid her arms across his knees. He drew his hands away. The amber of the twilight deepened as she scrutinized his face:

"Tell me of your home-land, Ariel, and of your boyhood, if you ever were a boy, you that are such a man now. Tell me all of it, and how you came to Babylon."

Piecemeal, naively, he told her the story of his birth, of his rearing, of his uncle and of his journey to the city, but he told it with careful exclusion of everything which could have given a hint of its underlying cause. He gave to it the color of a youthful sally, in the pursuit of fortune. And he could not bring himself to speak of the Rose of Jerusalem. The very name, it seemed to him, was too divinely good to be heard, in such a place or by such an ear. The listener led him on, with all her cunning. When he strove to avoid, she did not urge him. As his narrative ended, her fingers found his hand, and he did not draw it away as quickly as before.

"Son of Levi, as I have sat here listening, I had forgotten, for the time, that you are Majesty's guest, not mine. I wish—but I must not wish." She clapped her hands. A guard left his post, a little way below them, and came up, saluting.

"This is a royal guest. Conduct him to the chief chamberlain." And she added to Ariel: "He will summon the slaves who will show you to your suite, and serve you while you stay in the palace."

As soon as he was led away, Ista went, not willingly, to report to Blastus. His first interrogation was to the point:

"What brought the man to Babylon?"

"That I can not gain."

"That you must gain, and I want no delay."

"He guards it cleverly. I must have time."

"You must foil with cleverness, and you must be swift."



She gave her head a toss: "If the great sleuth wishes another spy, the Lady Ista begs him to choose one. She is not a traitor by trade."

"She is, for the time, a servant of the Lord Blastus: She will not betray her trust?" The last was put as a question. It had all the meaning of an ugly threat. The beautiful shoulders were shrugged up, and the Lady Ista left the den, aware that she had made no very happy impression upon the blind man, and strengthened in her obstinate will to make her task with the Jew as long as possible. She went directly to her own apartments to dress for the usual evening gathering about the throne.

The great chamber was filled with the familiar group, a little later, when the king and the queen came out upon the dais. It was against etiquette that any guest should be recognized as one of them until Majesty himself had made him welcome. So the son of Levi waited, far back toward the eastern doors, Ista with him. Whisper was answered by whisper as the crowds saw them together.

When the king and the queen were seated, Ista went alone to the dais steps and bowed till her forehead touched the stone: "Majesty, the Hebrew youth, whose presence was requested of the king, is here, obedient to the invitation." She stepped aside, and Ariel came forward, as he had been directed. His own gusseted mantle had been put aside, by order of the chamberlain. Jewish raiment was not the raiment for the court of Babylon, fine though it be. Instead,

he now wore a tunic of pale pink, terminating in long tassels of the same color, about the mid-thighs. Over this was an open robe of crimson and gold. He stood in sandals like those he had seen old Bilhan wear in his house in Jerusalem, and around his brow his slaves, at orders of the chamberlain, had wound a narrow crown of lilies. From under it his hair fell free over the rounded neck and the broad flat back and shoulders. So attired, the superb physique struck through its coverings, as it were, and made itself seen. There were low exclamations, of surprise and of admiration, too, as he stepped out, into full view. Belshazzar, peering down, shared the interest of the moment:

"By all the gods, good friends, here is a proper representative of the West. He is from a land which Majesty would hear of by private word. Your name, fair youth?"

"Ariel, the son of Levi."

"Ariel, ah. What is the meaning of the word?"

"It means the Lion of God, oh, Majesty."

"And the name goes well with that neck and that breast, does it not?" the king exclaimed. "Your father was wise, Son of Levi. Your native soil breeds able-bodied men."

"But it is almost desolate, oh, King."

"Desolate? We shall talk of that anon. We are now in entertainment. Another time I will question you fully. Until then, accept the hospitality of this, my court, and be assured that all those present will assist, to the end that your time shall not pass heavily."

In this wise the shepherd boy became a courtier. Pipes, strings and horns united in melodies delicious to his ears. All about him the faces, which had looked askance before his reception, now warmed in welcome. He was a curiosity, a member of an accursed race, elevated to a sphere not his—a comet, consorting with the fixed stars. Dance followed dance while he looked on, wild dizzy swirlings to and fro, men and women clasping each other and alternating the paces, at regular intervals, marked by the music, by stopping suddenly, disengaging, retreating by measured paces, advancing, resuming the clasp and continuing as before. He had no part in this diversion, but he surprised himself in the wish that he could imitate the grace of those he watched.

The women gave him more attention than did the men. They crowded about him, with smiles, and friendly nods and the swift ravishment of bright dark eyes:

“Will the Lion of God devour a Lamb of Babylon if she offer a grape to his lips?” purred one, a full-grown dame, with too much pink upon her cheeks.

“Oh, come with me,” cried another, a soft-voiced girl, not twenty, as she tripped up, catching his hands: “I must show you your brother, the Royal Lion of Ishtar’s grove; he stands on the wall, in the third group, down by the eastern door.”

But while he groped and floundered through these heaped-up temptations, he was helped, and by a heathen. Each time, as he was about to be taken in full control

by some bold daughter of the square, Ista herself led him away. And steadily she urged him to the wine. Cup followed cup, in recklessly close succession. A mounting exhilaration, a reckless enjoyment of everything, took hold of his senses. He caught at a half-blown rose, tossed toward him from a dimpled hand, and missed it. He heard a woman's voice in convivial song, and saw, in a blear, the whirling figure of a dancing girl who seemed to be nude or nearly so. Then lights, sights and sounds became a mixture. Nausea touched him for an instant and was gone. Ista spoke something in his ear, and her voice seemed to come from a vast distance. He was conscious of being carried, and of the feel of fresh air in his face. Some one muttered: then he was laid full length, and at ease, and an impetuous kiss was pressed against his mouth. His first appearance in the Court of Belshazzar was ended.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### IN THE GARDEN OF ENOS

**I**N THE evening of the eighth day after the son of Levi was received in the palace, Ansil and Enos, arm in arm, climbed the stair at the rear of the old physician's house.

"Enter," said Daniel, as he saw them through the open door. They seated themselves before either spoke. "Good father," said Enos, "we think our meeting place in the warehouse hath been discovered."

"Hath it? I have long wondered that the king's watchers missed it so repeatedly."

"Yesterday young Simon saw a captain of the royal police disguised as a pedler, slip in at the south door. He remained within for an hour, then came out stealthily and hurried away. Before evening one of the tax collectors called at the shop of Ami, in whose name the building stands, and inquired closely as to why a place seemingly so useful stood empty. Ami spoke of a dullness in trade. The collector smiled curiously and went away."

"And last night," added Ansil, "the slave of Monrad, the smith, whose mother was a woman of Israel, saw three strangers, in the habit of oarsmen, hide in the shrubbery that fringes the building's west wall. They lay there till the middle of night, then they went

in and came out again. It is ours to find another place, farther from the city's heart."

"Or nearer it—so very near that they will not seek it there."

"Meanest thou that?"

"And why not? Thine own house, Enos, hath a garden, with trees about it so thick that they form a screen. It is so near to the square that the noise of the revels comes plainly. We will gather there."

"When shall our youth, the son of Levi, gather with us?"

"When God wills, good friends. I can not answer ye."

Disappointment was plain upon the visitors. Ansil drummed his fingers upon his knees. When he spoke there was warmth in what he said: "Oh, Daniel, the wisdom of God is infinite, but thinkest not that we trust too much to him? Surely this youth was plainly instructed as to what he should do and when he should return!"

"I doubt not that he was, dear friend."

"Ah, I am the more comfortable, knowing it."

"Jehovah, I am sure, made all that clear to him."

"Jehovah!"

A brightness, kindly and almost humorous, came into the face of the patriarch. Then came gravity, profound, almost prophetic; he stood up, he looked up, he lifted his hands and the two who heard him shrank, as from something beyond earth.

"God of our people," he cried, "help Thy loved

ones to trust Thee. Teach them that whatsoever of strength they have is Thine, Thine only!"

There was silence for a little while, then the visitors arose softly, and softly, as men slip away from a sleeping child, or from a friend who sleeps that deeper sleep, they left him and went arm in arm across the garden and into the street. Enos stopped and took hold of the gown over his companion's breast:

"Ansil, we two have known him long, and better, perchance, than any others. Knowest why he is greater than all of us?"

"Aye, Enos. To-day I know it better than ever before."

"What, say you?"

"It is his faith. It is like the faith of a child in its mother."

The kindly face of Enos was working in its agitation. He clutched Ansil's arms:

"It is that, dear Ansil; it is that, and it is something more, higher, a deeper wonder. It is divine assurance!"

The garden behind the house of Enos was a large enclosure, as befitted an adjunct to the dwelling of a respectable merchant, turning more and more to quiet and meditation. It was walled with bushes and matted vines, completing a hedge, impenetrable to the view, and taller than a tall man's head. A fountain, near the center, was ringed with plane trees. The owner, and his friend Ansil, were two of a company which gathered there a few nights after their conference

with Daniel. The dark-robed figures which had gathered in the old wine warehouse theretofore, now came here, as stealthily and from as divers directions as they had to the earlier haunt. Three lanterns, placed in a triangular position under the trees, gave light enough. Except for the wider enclosure, and the overhanging foliage, the scene might have been the warehouse itself. Half the assemblage was there when the patriarch came, alone, directly from the nearest avenue, and without the least attempt to conceal, from possible spies, either the identity of his person or the destination of his steps.

When the last one came, Daniel called them all close about him, and prayed, a few words only. Then he spoke to them:

"Brethren, the young Jew who came to us out of Jerusalem is in the palace. Bidden thither for reasons which the king knoweth best, he nevertheless is there in the service of Him who opened the door that he might enter. This day he came to me. He hath not learned the king's will toward us. He must abide his time. Whatever he learneth will reach us quickly. Therefore, be ye of good cheer. Tell the people to be frugal, and patient. Tell them again to commune often with the Lord, for I, Daniel, say to ye, the Deliverance is near!"

A hush was over them. They spoke in whispers. Daniel stood looking over their heads toward the palace, glaring with lights and full of music.

Enos touched the patriarch's hand: "Oh, Daniel,



thy wisdom exceedeth ours. Tell us, hast thou special knowledge?"

He looked down at the questioner and his smile was half of earth and half of something better:

"Dear brother, ask me not that. Perhaps I know not. Perhaps I did but speak out of hope and not by revelation. Nevertheless, do ye as I have said. God liveth!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE LAMB OF LAEL

**B**EHIND a cottage between two great avenues west of the royal square, Lael and Mary, his wife, sat in a wooden seat. The day was ending and the shadow from the rose trellis lay across the walk of white shells and the grass beyond.

The woman raised her face from her elbow, resting upon the bench. Her eyes were inflamed with weeping. Her skin was fair and her long hair, as it fell unhindered over neck and shoulders, was golden brown in the sun. The man put his arms about her:

“Shall we go in, Mary? Come, mine own, it is not good to tarry here so long.”

She burst out again, a flood of sorrow not to be stemmed; not sorrow which is softened by tears but which tears manifest: “Great God, how can I live, how can I live! It was this hour, and such a day.”

The man’s hands clenched as he drew her over against his breast: “Hush, love, the Lord God must be just. He hath not forgotten us.”

“God?” She sprang from the bench and threw her hands above her head: “God? Where art thou in these days, thou thing whom we call God? Where wert thou when the wolves came down on this little fold? Where art thou now, and where is our lamb? Jehovah! Bel! Sin! Answer me, thou god who wilt!

Bring back mine own, and thee will I worship until I die, though hell receive me: Lael, I will!"

There was a step on the walk and Daniel was with them. He stood, his hands clasped behind him, his head inclined. The woman crouched on the bench.

"Lael, Mary, I bring thee news of thy child. She hath not entered the throne room."

The father and the mother embraced each other with the same cry, "God be praised for that."

"And listen, ye twain. I have said it before; I say it now again; her body may be made a spoil but the despoiler, not thy child, shall reap the harm thereof. I tell thee, up yonder is God. His great displeasure hath been upon us, but His mercy exceedeth His wrath. Thy darling is not lost. Remember that He who parted the sea before the feet of Israel; He who made man from the red clay; He who gave, even to me, power that I might confound the wise men in the court of the Great King, doeth nothing without a purpose. Canaan He gave us. Then He gave us into bondage for our sins. Doubt ye that He can save thy child, that not a hair of her head shall come to harm?"

The strange assurance of the manner, as much as the words, struck into the hearts of the listening two. It was not the first time the patriarch's feet had threaded the shell walk since that day when a column of mounted guards had swept up to their cottage.

What followed their coming was burned into their minds. The commander delivered to Lael what, in

form, was an invitation to their only child, the blue-eyed Ivah, she of the golden hair, to be the guest of the queen, in the royal palace. The commander stood eying the mother as she hurried to the father's side. His insolent face, his short spear, the jeweled belt running diagonally across his breast, sign of his authority, like the jewels on the scabbard of his dagger, had haunted her dreams as often as she had slept. Screams and the blindness of futile rage came when she understood their business. Mary and Lael were pinioned. Ivah, hearing their voices, came running from the garden, and was seized and carried away.

The last of this horror was mercifully lost upon the mother. Her senses forsook her as she saw her child's wrists lashed together with the thong. Her scream was that which Ariel and Kallai heard, as they turned up the cross-street upon the day of their entrance to the city; when they saw the royal horsemen, halted in the way, and hurried on, wondering, as they watched the guards bear out a young woman with a still white face.

Since Ivah's early childhood Mary and Lael had watched each step of hers, to guard against just this. Whenever she went forth from the cottage it was in some simple habit, chosen to conceal her charms. In the seclusion of home she was permitted to deck herself in rich attire. Again and again they talked together of the day, always a little in the future, when, by dint of a bribe or two, they should flee to the Mediterranean shores, to rear their child beyond the

shadow of Babylon. The growth of the little fortune made delays. Then came the festival. Children of all the city marched in the grand parade before the palace. Ivah, now in her seventeenth year, begged to be of the Virgin Galaxy, that procession in floral crowns which followed the king's musicians across the royal elevation. The father dissented but mother-pride in the rich Semitic beauty of the daughter linked itself with the thought that, among so many, the safety of the one would be secure.

So it came that Ivah marched, in her gala-day gown and her crown of flowers, and carried her palm branch like the others. Lael and Mary were among the thousands who saw the procession come across the open space before the eastern arches of the gardens. They saw the golden head afar, but they did not see the noble Kadric as, standing by the king's left hand, he bent forward when Ivah drew near. Fate had set her to march at the left of the last row, or at the end which passed nearer to the royal seat. Kadric touched Belshazzar's sleeve:

"Before the higher gods, Majesty, there goes a dream, alive."

The bleared eyes turned from a slave's shoulder to the line. He saw a mass of gold moving among the masses of jet. "Who is it?" he asked.

"I know her not. The combination is rare; nor the hair and the skin alone. By the bull's wing, Majesty, the goddess Ishtar oversaw the chiseling of her limbs. Your servant is interested."

The king looked after the figure. "Hiee," he called to a eunuch behind his chair; "see you the yellow head yonder? To the guards, and order that they learn where she abides, and bring her to the palace, in the usual manner."

So, on the day of her greatest happiness, the daughter of Lael was marked for the king. The incident was slight to them that knew the ways of Babylon. It slipped from the noble Kadric's mind, as easily as many matters, good and evil, had slipped before it, and Belshazzar, having given the order, forgot it in his second cup.

The northwest corner of the palace held the habitation of the concubines. Like all the rest of the structure, it ran severely to right lines. A long interior court, open to the sky, was broken by innumerable doors, each leading into a little suite. The court was beautified, every few paces, by colonnades of the purest marble. Between them plots of rare plants flourished in the spray of slow fountains. Curious seats and hillocks of pillows filled the angles on either side. Tame pigeons fluttered in and out of the rectangular gap far overhead. Indolent negresses swung wide fans in the odorous air, and a troop of eunuchs, armed with little whips, patrolled the place, watchful of every movement, attentive to every word. The spirits of the place, women of all lands, chosen for beauty of face and form, and for this alone, here wore out the days and the nights of their incarceration, with the aid of such amusements as the rules permitted.

At times a minstrel band was admitted, under guard. So with jugglers and soothsayers, and, more rarely, with pedlers, whose wares were inspected before they took them in. To be in the favor of Majesty, to gain promotion to the class of Woman of the Court, in which case, oddly enough, they were freed from the harem and granted leave to come and go at will, was the single dream of the most. This, and the knowledge that, if it came not, there should be a time when the beauty which doomed them faded, and they should be released to follow such pursuits as they could, made up their narrow lives.

The cavalcade, with Ivah in the litter in the midst, stopped down below the western gate of the area. Two of the guards toiled up the steps with their burden between them. Four eunuchs came out to help. The gates and the curtains within were folded back and the girl, still senseless, was carried in. The soldiers gave no explanation. The eunuchs asked none. It was not their first receipt of unwilling recruits to His Majesty's Garden of Love.

The girl regained her senses. Cool water was being sprinkled over her face. A negress, blacker than tar, sat by her couch, sprinkled, fanned, sprinkled again, and all with a composure which told of similar service before. Ivah clutched the dusky wrist.

"Where am I, and why am I not at home?"

The negress laid a finger over her lips.

"Speak, for the love of our Father, tell me now."

The woman shook her head. Ivah raised up, clasping her hands: "Oh, speak, tell me!" She clung to the stolid creature, trembling, half delirious.

The negress went into the area. Another woman came in. A girl, rather than a woman, for she was hardly older than Ivah. Disordered as were the Jewess's thoughts, there was that in the newcomer's manner which filled her with disgust. Dark of hair and of eye, full lipped, almost coarse in amplitude of bust and limb, she was a type of that which the ancients esteemed as feminine loveliness. She spoke Aramaic with a lazy lallation, affected by many because it was the natural speech of a class.

"A new bird? Ah, little Goldenhead, when did you come?"

"Oh, lady, the soldiers came and took me. Why is it?"

"Why? Little Goldenhead can jest. She knows."

Woman's insinuations may sometimes be lost on man; on a woman never. The gentleness of Ivah's rearing was no barrier against the understanding of that which went with the voice and the glance. The blue eyes flew wide; the head went back until the fair throat swelled.

"You are in the Garden of Love," the dark informant lisped on. "Hagar could not tell you. Her tongue was torn out, years and years ago, they say."

Ivah was huddled against the wall, her hands over her face.



"It is foolish to be sad, and the eunuchs may whip you. Be merry."

There was no response from the Jewess. She sat still, staring, not in an effort to realize what had befallen, for that she knew of a sudden, but to comprehend its full ghastliness. There came an interval in which she was left alone. She heard singing, out beyond her door, and wondered who could sing in that place. Then the dumb negress brought wafers and fruit and a cup of milk and honey. These she did not taste.

Night fell and the area grew quiet. The flowers of the king's garden were in their beds, and Ivah, too, lay down, as if to sleep. Softly, with stealth never before attempted, she slipped from her place and unbolted the door. The area was in semi-darkness. To her glance, each way, it seemed deserted. She had no idea of the arrangement of the place, but fate led her toward that door by which she had come.

On tiptoe, her hands clutching forward, she won within three paces of its bolt when a eunuch raised up from his niche, behind a pillar, unhooked his whip from his belt and pointed back. His beady eyes shone evilly. Desperation does not reason. She turned and ran down the area, shrieking. Eunuchs tumbled from cots and frightened faces peered from all doors. There was the clamor of questions and the snarl of menials. Before she was half-way to the eastern terminus she was seized, a hand was over her mouth and she was

dragged back to the little prison from which she had stolen.

Then a hag, so old that the flesh seemed gone from under her smoky skin, hobbled in, with a little pottle clutched in the two remaining fingers of one hand. She fixed the screaming prisoner with eyes so infernally bright that they had no kinship with her face. Hissing, then, as a cat hisses, she thrust the neck of the pottle into the girl's lips and poured down its contents.

Morning came to Ivah, a moment afterward. She was nervous and confused but there were no more outbursts. The saga's kindly services were not again required. The pure heart had received its thrust; the daughter of Lael had formed a resolution, strange to the times and worthy of the race of David.

In the days that followed, what had been a lingering look of the child, even in the grown woman, disappeared, quickly and forever. A little more pale than she had been, stately almost to grandeur, she aroused first the envy, then the pity, and at last the awe of the earthier beings around her. Their chatter and the chaff of their thought awakened no response in her. She stood aloof from their shallow pastimes as instinctively as she recoiled from their shamelessness.

She had received the education usual to the women of her race, a little knowledge of the simpler arts of the physician, a mass of Jewish traditions and a large, though it may be believed, a somewhat distorted under-

standing of the Psalms and the Prophets. A matron, who had charge of the mental culture of inmates, learned this readily.

“Bless you, Goldenhead, you need not another word to go to Majesty, nor another grace, say I. The stars smile on you, as they do not on some others here. The full throat and the hair go grandly with your eyes, they do. Keep the glad look in your face, and I say it, as I have no right, but that I know, the king shall ask for you before the moon dies twice. When he calls, be happy, for what I know I know. Another lady will roll on the pillows about his footstool.”

Ivah, with a little white smile, gave thanks, with her voice, for these assurances. The matron prattled on:

“The gods do lift up some. Maybe—keep this in your white breast—I may hurry the day when the chief eunuch asks for you. I know those who are near to the cedar. A word in the right ear, bless us, what may not come of it? There, now, be full of joy.”

She bustled away with the peculiar carriage of one who, having done a holy thing, escapes before the praises become embarrassing.

The Jewess sickened to the heart.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE CURRENT OF THE COURT

**O**F ALL the women who, caught or bought from all corners of the accessible world, had suffered immurement in the Garden of Love, no other ever won to such distinction as had the Median, Ista. Her name was lost. The name the king gave her was after that of the goddess Ishtar, the Venus of the Babylonian pantheon. A hill child, she was brought through the gate of the Rising Sun, one day, when she was hardly a child, still not a woman. A fierce old hag, who flogged her with a knotted rope, had her in keeping, the gods knew how. The steps by which she first came to royal attention, when the hag was impaled for the evil eye, were unforgotten in the Garden of Love, for she had stirred that place as a tiger might stir a dovecote. The preference of Majesty brought a freedom almost unknown to the queen herself. The queen she despised, and the king too, saving as his favor brought that power she craved. There were many who feared her. There was one she feared, and he was Blastus. Having seen her arise like a meteor, many looked to see her fall with equal swiftness. Some were wiser than to guess. Of these was Kadric. On a night, when she made the monarch leave his throne for a kiss, the ex-priest went out into the gardens and said to them: "Some day or night that she-

monsoon will fall in love, and when she does, oh, gods, your wisdom will be wanted here below. May the victim be, not I, but some one of my enemies."

When Blastus called for her for service against the Jews he strained his leash of authority. None knew it better than did he. Therefore, no sooner was Ariel in the palace than a secret watch was set over the pair. To Ista the adventure was adventure merely. She set herself to dazzle this young gourd of the West, and to steal from him whatever secrets he held, not in delight to do him injury, but in delight of triumph. To this task she bent her gifts, and they were many.

Nightly the son of Levi mingled with the throngs about the dais. He saw the king often, but the king asked nothing of the state of the provinces. And Ariel had no more opportunity to gain a hint of the royal disposition toward the Jews than if he had been among his native hills. He gathered a little gossip about the square, and learned that the city was marked for attack—nay, had been feebly attacked already, by the scattering forefront of some army from the north-east, but when he questioned Ista as to the royal moods toward Jews she turned his questions into other meanings and hushed his lips with wine.

It is said to be the way of woman that the suitor who is half cold gains a surer, swifter favor than he who is caught at the first cast of the net. The son of Levi knew that he was wasting days with a paramour. He knew with his reason, if not with all his mind, that all the flatteries showered upon him were

the stuff of falsity. Yet in his heart the wish grew that this fair creature, heathen though she were, might be of the beloved of his God. Still he kept aloof, while youth beckoned to his inclinations, and everything about him made relentless war against his higher nature. He knew, too, that the king chafed under Ista's absence. Kadric had whispered that. But he did not guess the crafty espionage which followed him. Nor did he know, one day, when he sought the favorite among the gardens, and found her talking with the noble, that the noble had just done telling her never to let the Jew, in the clearness of his eyes, blind her to the truth that he was of the race accursed. By way of reward, the ex-priest was sent hence with a speech which stung his ears, and caused him to mention the Spider's name in the same mouthful with more than one bad Babylonian oath.

Ista was called before the blind man daily, sometimes oftener. And while all this went on around him, the son of Levi began gradually to drift upon that current which was broad and easy and mightily stronger than it seemed. He had come to suppose that the Jewish population had almost lost account of him, and the thought was a part of the drifting motion. In it he deceived himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I wonder how fares the young Jew, Ariel," Enos asked of Zerubbabel. "He hath been at court until he ought to know somewhat of its moods. He bringeth the word that the child of Lael hath not been led

forth from the king's cage: more he bringeth not. And rumor saith that he is seen with the wanton Ista, day by day, day by day."

"Let us speak of this to Daniel."

They found him, bending over a bed of violets, which he had tended with his own hands.

"We are come to speak of Ariel, son of Levi."

"Oh, and will you have a handful of my treasures here?" He gave to each a little bouquet. "Made God ever anything fairer than these?"

"They are pretty," said Zerubbabel. "As to Ariel——"

"Thou art a man of action, Zerubbabel. Even beauty doth not swerve thee from a purpose; doth it?"

"I may not say, brother; why askest thou that?"

"Because, know ye, I think none other here is so qualified as thou art to lead the foremost expedition westward, when the time is come."

Zerubbabel and Enos exchanged glances. The former replied, almost impatiently:

"How fares the youth at the palace? He seemeth to bring no word of consequence. We dread lest that whirlpool may be drawing him down."

Daniel rolled the stem of a flower between his palms: "Friends, sometimes I think we are all of us under the spell of the square, or what it representeth. As to this youth, God cared for him among the hills and in the desert: God careth for him now."

"But his tender age—and he knoweth enough to put us all upon the stake. We must not be betrayed!"

“We must not?” Daniel stood between them and cast an arm about the waist of each. “Dear ones, if Jehovah preventeth not such a disaster, who can?”

The visitors looked into his face. It was all calmness. A light shone there, but not the light of madness. They went away, their heads bowed.



## CHAPTER XXI

### A KING DISCONSOLATE

THAT beneficent matron who had spoken to the daughter of Lael in the Garden of Love, alluding to the value of a word in the right place, whispered into the ear of the chief of the eunuchs. He passed the whisper, stealthily, to a man of the palace garrison, and the man carried it straight to Kadric, who received it with outward quiet, but with the welcome of all his soul.

Kadric, of late, had been more harried, less at ease for the stability of the court as it was, and more concerned for his own princely standing than ever before. He knew himself to be spied upon. He knew, too, that the Lady Ista arose each day before the meridian and went to a grotto, high up in the gardens, and that Ariel either was there before her or followed quickly.

Once he surprised them, climbing softly up the terrace and brushing abruptly through the dwarf palms at the mouth of the arch. There they were, face to face, on the cushioned stone bench on the inner side, a platter of untouched food at the farther end. He saw the woman's arm drop from the Jew's shoulder, and did not miss the quickness of the Jew's spring to his feet. The noble sought to carry off his intrusion as an accident:

"I was looking"—he said unctuously, as he bowed and backed—"for a lady less lovely, and alone."

"For whom?" Ista shrilled at him, through tiny teeth, bared in a danger smile.

"As to that, oh, Flower of Your Blessed Name-sake, show me mercy. The threads of love run bias: some of them must absolutely be concealed."

She cut him with her glances. Ill at ease, he left them. Later that day he came upon Ariel, who was emerging from the palace, refreshed by his second bath.

"Son of Levi, have you a moment?"

Ariel was plainly confused, but he answered with a show of frankness: "Forgive me, Noble, but I am hastening to an appointment. Will some other moment do?"

The ex-priest stepped nearer and his eyes were dark with seriousness:

"For me, yes. But for you——"

Ariel caught the whole warning of the half-ended speech. He knew the noble Kadric. Many a pleasant quip had passed between them, on the esplanade and in the thick of the throne-room crowds. He now felt a distinct alarm, perhaps arising from his conscience.

"What is it that you would say to me, Kadric?"

"Only what I would say to any man who eats the bread of royalty, my friend. What is the king's is the king's. Those who forget that—Babylon is not the place for them."

"Thanks." The Jew flushed and turned away. In

his heart he hated the giver of this keen blade of advice. He went to Ista, and as he went he reviewed the course of his life in the brief time since he came to court. Twice he had gone to visit Daniel, for a matter of an hour, in the afternoon. The vigilance of Blastus permitted that, for he knew the Jew could carry no word of the least importance. He was hemmed about more closely than he guessed. Now, as he thought of it, his time in the palace had been spent for little. He had learned that Ivah was still in the Garden of Love, and he had gathered, from chance remarks let fall by Ista and by others, that the Jews were quite as safe as they had ever been. Blastus carefully provided him with this last impression. These things he repeated to Daniel, and from both visits he returned to court with a feeling of having done a somewhat needless duty, one from which he was glad to hurry back to the marbles and the music.

He had come to think of the Lady Ista with a kind of pity. She had striven with her best skill to coax his secret out of him, he thought, but the effort was so weak, so very woman-like, that he smiled, many the time, at the artlessness of her questions. Sometimes, in his replies, he cut perilously near to the betrayal of some Jewish dreams, merely to see the light come into her eyes.

It was while he began to pity her woman's weakness that she began to put forth the full power of her arts—and they were many. If her breast pressed against his naked arm it was lightly, and for an instant

only. If her lips drew near to his, they turned away suddenly. She avoided his eyes. On the very day on which the noble Kadric found them, up in the gardens, he had taken her two hands in one of his, to raise her, playfully, from the cushions of a garden bench. She had pressed the hand with a sudden, fierce, quivering pressure, and then she had turned, and run from him, a sinuous, sensuous flash of grace, never before so very alluring as she then seemed.

And the noble Kadric had seen enough of this drift of events to set him wondering, in his own way, when and how Belshazzar would learn of it. As he wondered, he devised new ways to divert the royal mind from Ariel and Ista altogether. Therefore, when the whisper came to his ears from the Garden of Love, he heard it gladly and went straightway to the king:

"Oh, Majesty, your servant dares to remind you that a certain girl, with a head like shredded gold, marched past the east face of the gardens, yonder, on the day of the Festival of the Palm."

"I do recall it, my Kadric. I must see that yellow bud. She is a Jewess, I believe you said."

"She is; I doubt not the forgetfulness of Majesty is heavy upon her spirit—and the mercies of the king should never die."

Belshazzar leered, then a shadow crossed his face. "These women, Kadric, I sicken at the thought of them. I speak from the inner chamber of the royal heart. There is one, one only; she is the Lady Ista. Why should I hesitate to say it! Often and often,

Kadric, it is pressed in upon me, silently, that she is not the namesake of the goddess, but the goddess herself, come down to bless me. Why should it not be so! And I am minded to have Blastus before me, and to name a day, an early day, when he shall send her back to me."

"Far be it from the king's courtier to go against the judgment of the truly great," said Kadric, "yet, if Majesty should ask of me, I should reply that a little lengthening of patience could do no harm. The wise Blastus works in a darkness, deep as his own."

"Yes, but, by the holy horns, it gets upon the royal patience! I say it, and for none save you, that this affliction—this eternal vexation of the Hebrew people in my capital, shall cease! Often I think of it; some bright night, the riddle all unsolved: some bright morning—solved forever. It comes, like a vision, perhaps from the gods themselves."

"Majesty means a solution—with the sword—in wholesale?"

"Why not? Men and male children, they are a matter of fifty thousand. What are they to the guard, altogether! It might be done in a day—in less. Gods! Shall I, king of Babylonia, sit restless on my throne for the sake of a few shrieks and a flood of tears!"

Kadric hastened to lead away from the subject. Murder of men and babes was not to his noble liking.

"This Goldenhead, oh, Majesty, might she not be a welcome diversion, for some hours, at least? As

I remember, she was of a build which speaks to man in a language older than Aramaic, and quite four times as soft as the gulf winds."

"It may be as you say, my Kadric. Call it to my mind again, this evening or to-morrow—some other time. I am weary now."

The ex-priest sought the guard who had brought him the message he had borne to the king, and spoke to him. The guard returned to the chief of the eunuchs. Soon afterward there was a stir in the Garden of Love; hurrying hither and thither, the bringing out of gowns, and a tumult of interest and of talking. Ivah was the heart of all this. Her face was white and set, but she was obedient to all that was commanded. As through an evil dream, she heard the voices about her.

"What did I tell," whispered the bustling matron, who had first predicted her early progress to the king, soon after her imprisonment. "The gods do smile on some. La, la, you may be queen; who knows."

As Ivah's bridal robes were being prepared her resolution strengthened.

## CHAPTER XXII

### INTO THE DUST

**H**USHED by a vague mistrust of himself and his mission at court, and now stung deeply by the fear of royal jealousy, Ariel studied to avoid the Lady Ista. He shunned the gardens, except at those hours when they were so peopled with pleasure seekers that no particular meaning could be imputed to a meeting with any one. But in that studied avoidance he was keenly conscious of something lost out of his daily life. He had seen her new mood toward him, in the last days of their sweet-stolen communions, and had reasoned, man-fashion and in secret bitterness: "While she believed she could wrench my secret from me she was warm to me. When she finds that she can not, she is cold. She is a pagan, and yonder in Jerusalem, Nana waits for me, Nana the Rose." And he fell to setting the girl of the West against the girl of the East, in his mind. Again and again he did it, always with the same result. In the West was unsullied innocence, blindly trusting him. In the East was the glitter of all bad wisdom, trusting nothing. But Ariel was a man, and young, and Ista of Babylon was a woman, and her beauty was a saying. Moreover, the blood of the Jew was warm, and the Rose of Jerusalem was far away.

It was now high noon, and he was wondering if the gardens were full enough to make it prudent to

go there, as he crossed the blazing southern esplanade and came into the rich coolness of the throne room. It was empty, as he knew it would be. From the door he turned down the south wall. As he went he glanced up at the glaring obscenities of the mural art, and smiled a little at the recollection of the shock those very groups had given him, at his first appearance there. So short a time, yet he could study them now without a qualm. The realization did not hurt. Already he was looking back upon his unsophistication with a kind of scorn.

Here was the Babylonish world, close-massed, all about him; wrong, no doubt; to be damned beyond a question, yet—it had grown up slowly; God had endured it long. Might he not endure it longer? Who could say! He heard a step, over on his left, and there came Ista, slipping in, as if to steal upon him unseen.

“My Lady Ista, I thought I was alone. I am——” He checked the truth, which was that he was glad to see her.

“I have hunted you, Son of Levi, one full hour. What will you say of that!”

He answered with commonplace banter, but his face belied it. He was flattered. “And now that my lady has found me, tell me why she sought me. I am quivering to know.”

She looked out, level and accusingly, under the long fringes of her eyes: “Why have you kept away from me?”



He glanced behind him. His response was a whisper: "You know, you did not need to ask."

"I do *not* know, but you shall tell me. No, not now"—she smoothed his tunic across his breast—"you shall tell me this afternoon. I have arranged it. Oh, you never could guess what I have planned. Try; what do you say?"

"Whatever it is, it is delight to me, if it means——"

"If it means what; say on?"

"If it means no harm, no danger to you."

She laughed. "Nothing means danger to me. The only danger is to you. Are you willing?"

He threw out his chest: "Whatever it is, I am not merely willing, I am wild to do it. Is it a boat ride? A few more lessons and you say I can row in the royal matches."

"What were the danger in that? It is no boat ride. It is more exciting."

"Not another dance of the deities such as you made me see that night in the north gallery?" he asked, in whimsical accusation.

"No, no, you can not guess. The chariot!"

"Splendid, and where? Down the Avenue of the Diadem, or across the river, where the Ethiopian gamblers live, and fight to the death for a coin, with knives between their toes?"

"Not that; we are going beyond the walls; not a word to any one. You know the old park, west of the Gate of Lions. You and your guide came past it as you reached the city. It is a wonderful place

within. And you are sure that you are in no wise afraid?"

"Of the royal wrath, you mean? I am not a coward, Lady Ista. If you will run no risk, I take chance, and my heart will be light, as it now is." He bent his face until it was close to her own.

"But the city is besieged!"

He stood staring a moment, thinking she spoke in mirth.

"Ah, yes, it is true, my Lion. An army is drawn up, over beyond the northern wall. There is an order that travelers inbound may enter the gates, but that none shall pass out without a writ of leave, signed by the grand commander of the portals."

"So, and you have the writ?"

"Not I, but Ista goes where Ista wills. Still you are not afraid?"

He made a gesture of denial.

"Then we start, at the second hour after the mid-day. All the court will be in the gardens. The chariot will halt at the second flight of steps, yonder on the south. Be there. You will? Tell me you will!"

There was a pleading uncertainty in the tone. The Jew bent over her again: "Dear lady, there is not that in Babylon, nor upon earth, nay, nor in Heaven, to hold me. I will come."

She was hurrying away when he called her back: "Of what nation is that army over at the north?"

"Oh, that? I never heard. What matter; the

wall is there. If all the world came down together it would be the same."

By the crystal hour-glass in his own chamber the Jew watched the approach of the time for leaving. He half repented of his consent to go. A dim foreboding of evil sat upon him. Nana, to whom he had sworn a passionate oath, what would she say, she, in her guileless trust? But Nana was far away. Perhaps—it was a happy thought—perhaps even yet he might awaken in the Lady Ista an understanding of God! Could God deny a prayer for mercy from her lips! His very faith drew back aghast at the thought. But again, the army at the north; who were they? The question disturbed him. It linked him, somehow, with the purpose for which he came to the palace. He did not love to think of that.

As the hour-glass emptied itself he went out, and skirted the esplanade, in sight of the south arches of the gardens. He went quickly, dreading to be seen. South, past the eastern end of the palace, and he reached the second flight of steps.

A double team of the king's white stallions, hitched all abreast, stood pawing and tossing their heads. A slave, at the bridle of each of the outer two, controlled them. The rich blue and gold blazoning of the outcurving, half-circular bed, the blooms, wound thickly into the wheels, and the elegant sheen of the mounting of the harness offset the clumsy weight of spoke and pole. And there was the Lady Ista, holding

fast the white leathern ribbons, a bareheaded deity about to ride the clouds. The equipage apparently had driven up a moment before.

"I drive," she cried, as Ariel mounted beside her. She called to the slaves at the bridle to release.

The Jew had difficulty in keeping his feet as the four went forward. It was his first chariot ride. He was thrilled as they raced down past the south side of the elevation and on through the vent in the inner wall. Reaching the outer avenue they fairly flew. Pedestrians, seeing the flash of the turnout, hastened to give it room. The horses were keen, and she who drove them, skilled as she was, had need of all her strength to keep them in control.

She slackened the reins, and they plunged, and instantly broke into a run, which caused the car to pitch and bound so violently that Ariel knelt on the floor and clutched the rim of the bed. He would not let her see his alarm. He glanced up at her face. It struck him, then, that he never saw a woman's face so recklessly beautiful. Once he asked if she would not give the reins to him:

"Never; they are mad to run. By the gods, now watch them have their fill!" Hair loosened and streaming, poised like a spirit of the air, whip seething, she cried out to them to go.

The way was that by which Ariel and Kallai had entered the city, and now they were close down upon the Gate of Lions. A small child looked up from its

play, at the edge of the roadway, and dropped a stick with which it had delved in the earth. Then it made as if to cross, in front of the rushing four.

"Back there!" shouted Ariel.

"Will you die, you fool!" screamed Ista.

The little being stared for one moment, then ran, with the full-fed gait of little children, toward the other side. There was a scream from somewhere in the square across the avenue. Ista whirled the steeds to the left, thinking to miss the child. In that moment it stopped, and the team looked to be literally upon it. A wrench at the reins, and the woman threw the pair on the right upon their rear legs. The forehoofs of the outer one flashed, pawing, right above the small black head, then down they came, the littlest space to the left, and horse and chariot shaved past, not so much as touching the quivering little body.

Ista swung her whip as the bed of the chariot passed. The lash caught the chubby cheek, just where it turned to the chin. As they thundered on, the Jew saw the blood leap out and the bare arms go up to the injury. A woman reached the child's side then, and carried it out of the highway.

The action terrified Ariel. Also it hurt him in a tender part. He had not looked for such a mood in the Lady Ista. Moreover, it reminded him of his first meeting with her; and the backward slash of the slave's whip, which had been the cause of the meeting.

Ista glanced down, brows clouded and cheeks flaming, as though an insult had been hurled up from the

roadside: "Will these cattle learn, ever, to keep their calves aside when Ista rides! That one was nearer the mouth of the Great Pit than he ever will be again, before he goes inside. Look, how the stallions reach away!"

"Give me the reins, I say. You can not hold them—here!" He tried to spring up at her side, but the lurch of the chariot threw him forward. She caught his shoulder, holding the reins in one hand, for the moment, and laughing, so that her speech was only half articulate.

"Hold fast! Can Ista drive? Say, Lion, can Ista drive? Cling fast to the rim of the bed—we are about to run the gate!"

Despite the army to the north, and the order forbidding exit, the valves of the gate stood open. As the turnout dashed up toward the guards, they ran out, each from his own side of the aperture, holding their spears horizontally in a signal to stop.

"Hiee, back, back, ye wretches; see ye who it is? Back there!"

They did stand back, frankly amazed, and the chariot shot beneath the arch and across the bridge beyond.

It was the Jew's first glimpse of the outside of the city since his coming. But he was not thinking of the view to the left or to the right. He was thinking of a daredevil ride and a broken order, and, more than of these, of a child with a gashed cheek. Yet, through some perversity which made him reason

against his own reason, he was saying, within himself, that the Lady Ista was provoked with cause; that the blow might be to the child a blessing in disguise; might even save its life.

At the corner of the old park they left the team in charge of two stout husbandmen, called out of the nearest field.

Breathing rapidly, from the rush of the air in the race, the woman leaned upon the Jew's arm. "Can I drive, my Lion?"

"You drive like a goddess. But I thought that child was gone."

She laughed, never more sweetly: "He thought with you. His face turned to curds."

Ariel was frowning a little and his face was averted. She glanced narrowly at his profile: "Oh, I can read your thought; you can never hide one single feeling behind that face. You think the Lady Ista was cruel." She stopped short, and turned him about, to face her, searching his eyes. "I know you do. But believe me, Son of Levi, I never meant to strike that child; I meant only to frighten it."

The cloud lifted from Ariel's brows: "I knew it; how came you to dream that I really thought you cruel? Let us forget it; I have forgotten it even now."

A narrow lane went from the corner through a wilderness of vines and flowers and foliage, so densely thick that the birds, which had their homes in the tangle, seemed, by the beating of their wings, as they were frightened by the approach, to be enmeshed there.

Ariel and Ista lost themselves among the glades. Overarched, so deep, so still, so sweetly cool that the paths were like caverns, it was a wonderland to Ariel, doubly alluring by its contrast with the heaped-up unnaturalness of the great metropolis. Spiders had spread their airy works from anchorage to anchorage across their way. Sometimes the ground was worn bare, in narrow streaks, and the prints of small claws told of the coming and going of wild things. Again it was solidly overgrown with grass and strewn with bloom, upright in the heavier shadow, drooping where the sun spilled through the leafy rifts above.

A sharp turn brought them out into an oval space, cleared and level, and bordered with lofty trees except on one broad gap in the east side. Nebuchadnezzar had decreed that no woody plant should live there. He had loved to see his capital, even as he took his rest in the midst of his sport. Now the distant summits could be seen, through the dance of the lessening heat.

In the center of the oval was an old stone fountain. Water stood in the bowl, but the spray was stilled. The shade made the air seem green. A bench, overhung with lichens, stood beside the bowl, and a thrush, which had been perched upon it, fluttered away as the invaders neared.

The woman sat upon the end of the bench, leaning far back, one braceleted arm extending along the stone. The Jew was standing behind her, staring through the gap, at the hazy, tooth-like turrets of the



outer rampart, and the massive, gray frieze work of the overtopping palace roof, airy in the distance. Would he ever forget that sight, as it burst upon his innocent eyes that day, when he and Kallai swung about the angle of the park and saw it for the first time! Then he saw it as the Babylon which was shortly to be humbled. Now he saw it——

“It is great, Son of Levi, much too great. Forget the shepherd’s dream.”

He almost sprang at her, as she coiled there, on the seat. She had read the secret thought. She had plucked the deepest meaning from his mind and tossed it into his face.

“What does the Babylonian say to the Jew? You speak a riddle.” His tones were all too serious for a matter outwardly so small. Wild creatures out through the wood sat up at the peal of her laugh:

“Son of Levi, Lion of God, ward of old Daniel, spy! Why look so red and terrible? I am only a woman. Saving ourselves, there is no mortal in the park. Slay me, if you will; I am a heathen, and deserving death, you know—here, I have a dagger.” She slipped a little bright blade from her girdle and held it toward him. He took it and threw it against the earth, and the blade sank to the guard.

“Son of Levi, I brought you here to see the twilight come, and to watch my godmother, the moon, rise over the walls. How sweet it is. The crickets are singing; can you hear them? I have brought you here to talk with you, and to let you talk to me.

First, tell me, do you know the meaning of love, mad, blind, blazing love?"

Ariel's face was set. "Yes, Lady Ista, I know what love is. There is a virgin in Jerusalem who waits for me. Before I left her I swore, by things holy, to save myself for her. By God, I will keep my covenant."

Her black eyes narrowed, and became bright slits, and her tones were like struck metal:

"You have never told me why you came to Babylon. You would not even tell me why you came to court. Listen, then, till I tell it to you: You came to the city, dreaming that you would help to free your people. You came to court to keep an eye upon the king. He summoned, old Daniel bade you go. You went, full of hope. How much have you learned, oh, Jew?"

He was white with astonishment and humiliation: "Whatever I learned, I could not tell it."

"No? Ah, you do not deceive the little girl of the footstool. All your time in the palace has done no good whatever to any Jew on earth, not even to you yourself. I was set to the task of wringing from your lips the whole of the Jewish plans. I knew as much as you know, Son of Levi; many nights ago I knew it. I could have said to Blastus, the work is done, and that tall body would have been dead, oh, how quickly. I have played, against the Spider and the king, for time. Can you understand why?"

He did understand, and the understanding drove

his heart to new exertions. But he lied. "I can not guess. What moves you to this great length of kindness?"

"What was it that made me spare your life that first day, when you struck my bearer and stopped my litter on the avenue? What was it that made me dare the gossip of the square, and the cunning of Blastus and the rage of Belshazzar himself, and the order against departure from the city, and the spears of the guards at the gate back yonder?" She was on her feet, her face blazed; such a fire as he had never seen in any face; deadly and fascinating. She reached out her hands, as if to clutch him. "Hark, Ista speaks, and to a Jew. You came to overthrow that city. Fool; the massed armies of all the earth could never do it. You came to lead the Jews out of it. Fool; they are dedicated to death, every male of them, you and the rest, and the women shall become the mates of men who are men indeed. You thought to outwit us. Fool; you have been outwitted from the beginning. Yet here am I"—she paused, panting for breath and sank upon the seat—"because, because"—her voice broke into a bitter sob.

His head was a whirlwind of sudden crashing realization. Dream after dream, hope after hope, fell before that blast. Poor Rose of Jerusalem, what shall become of thee now! For out of all the wreckage one clear wonderful fact arose: Ista, arch-pagan, had saved him from death, and was fighting for him now.

*In the little time that he knelt above her, while*

her sobs shook her matchless shoulders, he himself lived through a time incalculable. The solid world of yesterday had melted from beneath his feet. And the going left him, for the time, bereft of all guidance. He looked into the sky, now feathery with the dusk, and the sky gave no sign. He looked down, and saw the bent figure and the dark shapely head, bowed into the small white hands. The son of Levi was a man, and young, and a gross temptation had been like a thorn in his flesh for many days and nights. For Ista of Babylon was a woman whose beauty turned men's heads. If the Jew had fought, with all his power, against a world-old enemy of high ambition, he lost his battle, now, in the same full measure. The pet of the king was suddenly caught and enfolded in tense straining arms. She was crushed against a broad breast, and his fervent lips stopped the words she tried to utter. The warnings of Kadric, the cunning of Blastus, the wrath of the sovereign were swept from his mind by the fierce drive of his passion, let loose from leash, all in a torrent. He terrified her in the wild vehemence of his embraces. All the fabric of that sacred purpose which brought him out of Jewry turned ashes and was not. He saw a single purpose in the world—possession—possession of her. And like lightning, stabbing through a black storm, great grotesque ideas shot through his brain and rushed into his speech:

“Love, Girl of the Moon, here, turn your lips to mine, for I will have my fill of them—hearken to me!

With you to help me, I will kill the king, I will kill the Spider, and seize the throne. Then I will call the Jews to arms. We will seize the walls. I will make myself master, and prop up the tottering kingdom, and the Jew and the Gentile both shall learn how well a man can rule. Tell me, swear to me that you will help me do this thing, and be my queen. Oh, Ista, it will be the fulfillment of the prophecy, and of love as well!"

She patted the blue and white flowering of the tunic, stretched tightly across his breast:

"How grand, my Lion, but how like your race—how splendidly absurd." She laughed the laugh of tolerance, and gave her lips up to him—"Every noble would rise, every cyclops and all his staff; that pretty breast would be pierced, so cruelly, and I, ah, what would become of me."

He held her closer to him as she purred on: "No, that would be madness. There is one way only. We must fly, fly, swiftly, and afar, and build our nest on the farther side of the world. Every Jew in the city, I tell you, is marked for death."

The thought was a stripe to his flesh. "Oh, tell me, Ista, tell me it is not so. Surely they can not all be doomed."

"The hairs of their heads are numbered. All of them, and you. Nothing can save them. A few, a very few, may flee the gates, if they are warned. And you must warn them. But you must not warn too many, and they must go stealthily, and to different

gates, bribing their way, for fear the Spider guessed the truth. The first to go will be the luckiest."

Ariel groaned as he listened, but he clung to her, as to the one support remaining to him in this hour of cataclysm.

"We must fly," she repeated.

"To the east, or the west, or the south?" he cried.

"Ah, Ariel, I know of a land," she whispered, "where the wind is like the breath of fans, and the sea is all blue oil by day and all abrim with stars by night. And there are happy gods and goddesses, and groves and temples and songs, and wine—and love. But it is far to the west, my Lion of God——"

"The land of the Hellenes!"

"Yes. It is love's own realm, but it is beyond the sunset, and the going is full of dangers, and whoever lives there must be rich, or all its glories are nothing."

He stood up and spread out his hands, and his face was alight with a fresh-born determination.

"Yet we are going to Hellas, to dwell there all our lives, my darling, you and I; far from this idiot king and his damned court, and the poor hopeless Jews. Now swear to me something. What god or goddess do you love best?"

"Ishtar, forever and ever."

"By Ishtar, then, swear that you will flee with me, and make me forget, in the cups of pleasure, the downfall of my race!"

"But the journey will cost a little fortune, and when we arrive, what shall we do? Babylon is mine,

but I do not even know the use of money. I have no need for it. And I could not pillage the treasury. It is always guarded."

"I know of a treasure. It was sanctified to another use."

"What use; the use of the Jews?"

Ariel nodded, and a lump came into his throat and his eyes filled. She took his face between her hands:

"They can not use it, Ariel. They shall not live to need it. What cause, then, could it serve which is better than the cause of love?"

His reply was tense, fierce, almost a scream: "I know it, I know it. Now swear to me, swear by Ishtar, as I told you."

She pulled away the bodice of her gown, and knelt at his feet, bending backward till the bare breasts pointed to the mid-heaven:

"I swear it all."

He caught her up, and with an arm about her, hurried away through the darkness, guided by the distant neighing of steeds. "Where is the treasure?" she gasped.

"In a heap of stones on the old temple floor in Jerusalem. It is a casque of gems that would enrich Belshazzar himself. Back to the city, then, dromedaries, and we flee this night, across the desert, through Palmyra, and on through Palestine to the sea, and then, a fast-running galley for Hellas."

"No, love. Belshazzar has sworn that he will make me his lawful queen, and that he will conquer another

country, and give it to me for a bridal gift. His arm is long. If we fled together, not even Hellas would be far enough away to save us from his rage. And the caravan route would be too easy a trail for the pursuers, on their camels, with their little knitted ropes to bind us with. Nay, we must disappear singly; you first, I a little later. We can plot; we can make believe that you are very sick, or that you are dead. Bribes will do anything. I can feed him a slow poison, to blunt his senses when I follow you. But can you tell another where the treasure is hidden, so well that he can find it?"

Ariel thought a moment, of the faith of his uncle in the blind mortise that held the casque. But many beliefs of his youth had been shaken within the hour. He answered firmly and in a voice needlessly strong, as though he would convince himself, as well as her:

"Yea, there is no doubt whatever. It lies in a heap of stones, guarded by an old Masonic secret."

"How wonderful! And there is a wretch who would go into hell's jaws for me; a camel driver and a very fox of the desert. I saved him from impalement, once, and the judges branded his left cheek and pierced his ears with great holes. He can go after the gems."

"Yes, yes."

"And when he brings them back, then you shall take the most of them, and hurry down to the head of the gulf, secretly, and make ready a ship for instant sailing. I will come there to meet you, swift as a swallow the moment I can steal away; then the warm



winds and the blue, blue sea, and Hellas when we choose. Good gods, how long we have been away! The moon has cleared the walls, long ago. The throne room must be full by this time." She said this last in a voice suddenly dropping low in apprehension.

The stallions streaked over the dark roadway toward the rampart, impatient as the riders were to be at home again. The chariot awoke the echoes as it crossed the bridges of the many moats. Fireflies, all around them, made the darkness seem like edges of the sky, tucked in. They met no challenge at the gate. Ista quieted the pace of the team as they neared the inner wall.

Ariel broke a silence: "Everything I have done in Babylon is a lie and a mockery; everything except my love."

She turned to him, with a smile, glorious in the moonlight:

"But when we love, what matters all the rest!"

"Yes, when we love, what matters the rest," he repeated, again as if he would assure himself. Behind his lips he held the cry, too silent even to be thought into words: "Poor Rose of Jerusalem, my God, be good to her!"

The chariot rumbled on, and paused for a moment at the first street running south from the royal elevation. Ariel left it before it was fully stopped, and the paramour, worse alarmed than she had betrayed to him, because of the lateness of the hour, urged the horses to the palace steps.

The king had been long on the dais and the chamber had been filled for more than an hour when she entered it. Belshazzar saw her at the door, and immediately spoke to the eunuch named Gur. He went straight to Ista, out in the crowd, and she at once approached the cedar. The royal face was dark:

"Where has the favored of Majesty been this evening?"

"Oh, King, in another attempt in your Majesty's service, I drove to the old park, out beyond the Gate of Lions," she said in a low tone.

"With the young Jew?"

"Yes, Majesty."

His lips worked under his beard. He did not speak, but presently drained another goblet, and ordered the musicians to strike a livelier air. As the girl turned away from the dais, knowing the interview ended, fear, and fierceness with it, gathered in her breast. She had seen the royal face turn black before.

\* \* \* \* \*

At about the same time, the son of Levi was engaged in deep and earnest parley with a hard-favored man, in the darkest corner of a large rambling barn, down many squares below the royal quarter. In the course of the parley, he held before the fellow's eyes a tiny golden talisman, which Ista had given him from about her neck. A little later he hurried out of the building and toward the palace.

He had hardly reached his destination when a powerful dromedary, fitted for desert journeying, was

urged through by-streets, in a diagonal course, toward the Gate of Lions. The guards had, each, a bribe sufficiently heavy to make them roll aside the gates, just closed. Beast and rider passed under, and fared westward, before the climbing moon. A great scar covered the man's left cheek and both his ears were pierced.

In this wise, Ariel, son of Levi, came down into the dust.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### WHEN MAJESTY FROWNS

**T**HOUGH the hour was early, for the heart of Babylon, Ariel saw the throne room clearing as he neared the elevation. He was alarmed by this, and was resolving, and also dreading, to inquire of some of the guard, when he saw the unmistakable form of the noble Kadric, in silhouette for a moment, as he left the middle exit on the south. The Jew waited at the foot of the stair.

“Why is the crowd going hence so early, noble Kadric?”

The ex-priest replied without turning his head: “Come to the second river gate, north, in half an hour, and keep out of sight.” Then he strode straight on. Watching him from the esplanade, one might have sworn that he never addressed the Jew at all. The manner, and the import of the tone, turned the son of Levi sick with fear. He had walked many a merry league with Kadric. He had listened, often with laughter, to the crooked wisdom of the arch-hedonist of the square, and never, in all their intercourse, had he received from the noble anything but kindness. The warning, that day, not long before, that he who forgot that the king’s was the king’s was out of place in Baby-

lon, rushed back upon his recollection now. He knew, without being told, that something frightful had occurred. Drawing his cloak about his neck and shoulders and bending his head low, he hurried westward, skirting the base of the elevation. At the southwest corner he hurried on, turned into the first by-street running north and gave the palace a wide berth as he circled up toward the appointed place. He came out cautiously to the second gate, and stood back in the shadow of the row of ancient plane trees at its inner side when he saw no person near it. His waiting was prolonged until the fear that he had misunderstood the place was added to his other fears. Then he saw a dark ample figure, threading its way toward him from the direction of the palace, and keeping close to the bowls of the trees as it came. He stretched out his hands:

“Kadric!”

“Not here. Come with me, and softly.”

They stole through the open gate and out upon the quay. A little boat lay moored to a ring in the flags, and near it a gaunt old man was sitting, knees wrapped with his arms and supporting his chin. They came up behind him and he did not stir. Kadric touched his shoulder and he was up in an instant. By signs, which Ariel did not understand, the ex-priest gave an order. They stepped into the boat. It was cast loose, and the oarsman began to move it up the stream, so quietly that one on the banks must needs have listened closely to catch the sound.

"He is deaf; nevertheless, speak nothing aloud for a while. This is Babylon," whispered Kadric.

The lights along the banks receded and grew fewer as the bark moved up against the sleepy current. The air was chilly, and the passengers drew their cloaks more closely about their necks and arms. They passed the blind ends of the inner wall, which came in to lean upon the walls of the stream, and then, on either hand, they were between wide suburbs, whose toilers had gone to their slumber long ago. Kadric spoke out, sharply:

"Son of Levi, where have you been to-night?"

"I was out of the city till after sunset. A matter of business kept me a little while after I came to the city again. Is the king ill?" Ariel said all this in a voice that was hoarse with agitation.

"Out of the city, against the order of the master of the portals!"

"I went with the Lady Ista."

"Out of the city with Ista, after sunset!"

Ariel huddled, speechless. He sat in the stern, and Kadric's face was close to his.

"Son of Levi, are you ready to die?"

The Jew had touched the lowest depth of his first alarm. He answered with a flash of the martyr spirit:

"How?"

"Before a silent group, in a sunny nook in the gardens, some morning; with a stake six cubits long thrust into your belly?"

"Kadric! Why ask that!"

"You do not fancy that? How, then, if you were stretched up, like a hammock, and flailed to death with strips of dried bull's hide?"

"God, Noble, that talk is horrible to the soul. Tell me——"

"Not that way? How, then, if you were clamped tenderly on a table, with gutters at the sides of it, while a pair of slaves, skilled in that delicate art, stripped off your living hide, in cunning little strokes. You would not be the first."

Ariel was very still while the boat moved the distance between two gates.

"Noble, your words have frightened me, more even than death frightens me." He put his hands on the gunwale of the boat, suddenly, and with a forward start of his body. The Babylonian clapped hands upon his arms:

"Not that, my son, not yet, at least. That water is foul, and deep, and none too warm. But listen to me; I am older than you, and when the skies flash lightning, even the wild ass hunts the brush; when the king's face looks as it looked to-night, no man is safe, Jew or Gentile."

When Ariel spoke again his voice was hard: "Am I, then, marked for a particular death?"

"Not yet, but it is very near. Unless I misread the present, in the light of the past, it is closing in."

"Do I need to ask you why?"

"You need not, yet you ask it. He who crosses a king in love had better slap the royal jaws."

"Oh, Kadric, you must help me, you must help me to ward off danger from her. I could bear ruin myself, but what would become of her?"

"Become of Ista? What has always become of Ista? She will come through the storm, unscathed, but death will mow among the others. I have seen it done before. That wench is a witch, my son. And to-morrow morning, I predict, you shall see what you never saw before, and will never wish to see again. To-night the king spoke to Ista when she came in, after he had watched for her for one black hour. She was deadly late. After she stepped down, I heard him say to the chief of the privy guard, 'Arrest some Jew, I care not whom, and cast him into the pits.'"

"Good God; what for?"

"To-morrow will tell you. I myself can only guess, but I can guess closely, yet I will not guess aloud. You deserve to wait, and wait you shall. But, may his God be kind to the soul of him. There is no mercy for his flesh. And mark this," Kadric lifted his hands for emphasis, "he will not be the first to be offered up on the altar of a woman's whimsies, neither the last." He seized Ariel's hands: "Oh, you young blunderer, blind, helpless, betrayed—have you no mind, that you did not see all this? The Jews are doomed, yea, damned. Will you trade your own life for the sparkle of a girl's eyes? You are shortly to be taught a dark red lesson; I know. Learn it, and learn it quickly: then flee to the hills you were born in. There! I have said what might cost me all the pleasure of the



very pleasant years I hope to live. These Jews, they baffle me. They are not an accursed race, yet curses are rained upon them. One of them, I fully believe, is a truly wise man. I have heard that he is deeply good. The God he worships is picturesque, lonely, strange. I can not understand why the stripes fall so heavily upon you. It is as if the gods had singled you out for punishment."

Ariel broke in, firmly: "Not the gods, oh, Kadric, but the One God, our own Jehovah."

"God, then. Son, sometimes I come near to the heresy that, in some day which is yet afar off, all the peoples of the earth shall learn that God, after all, is One, and that the many gods are only phases of Him, as the phases of the moon are merely different aspects of the same; and thus that all religions were false, and yet they were all true. However, I am not sure. Nor do I greatly care. I have worshiped a swarm of gods. I have made the incense smoke as black, and smell as loudly as any, and I have reddened my hands with living immolations. But Pleasure is the only God I ever worshiped with all my heart. I have offered up the better part of myself to her, and she begins to fail me now. Your Solomon knew the feeling. He was wise as to this world, whether or not he knew much of the next one. Some of his wisdom was stolen from the elder seers, but what of that? He was a teacher. Remember his foreign wives, and flee. I tell you the net is falling."

The little launch had reached the northern gateway,

under which the river entered the city. The current purred continually as it laved the giant bronze standards of the span. Kadric signaled, the boat turned and began to drop down over the way by which it had come. The son of Levi sat digesting his thoughts. He said not a word until they had landed, at the point of embarkation, and passed through the river gate together.

"Here we part," said Kadric, glancing each way along the darkened avenue.

Ariel seized the noble's hand, and pressed his cheek against the cheek of the other. His voice was strained and strange:

"Noble One, thanks for all this. I may take your advice."

"Do so, or dress for death."

"I may take your advice—more probably I shall die. If I do, some heathen blood shall be let before I take my last breath."

The ex-priest, who had turned away, came back, as if about to add some argument. Ariel was standing, very still and very white, looking up past the dark bank of the treetops. The older man saw that his hands were clenched.

"Go back, now, to your chamber. You are safe, for a little, little while. Sleep if you can. Keep sober to-night but take a long draught in the morning."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE RED LESSON

**N**IGHTS of total sleeplessness, common in story, are rare in fact. For the first time in his life Ariel knew that long grinding out of hours which is the handmaiden of the very worst affliction. Not once did he lapse into forgetfulness. Never, for one moment, did he cease to dread the undefined something which the morning would bring. His dread was not deepest for himself, for he had sunk to that depth in which sorrows solely his own become a kind of balm, welcome as a just payment. He groaned for his people. He wept as he thought of the maiden who, in the khan in Jerusalem, waited for him to solve that problem which was not to be solved, and prayed for things now past all possibility. In those grim watches he uncovered all the secrets of his heart to his own conscience. And for reward, he saw the truth in its black ugliness; a whole race on the brink of death, a cause irrecoverably lost, himself the object of particular anger, marked no doubt for special torture; even his faith in God, as he started to believe, shaken to its foundation. Had he not sent a heathen scoundrel flying westward to plunder that treasure which was sacrosanct! Could God be tricked by evil? Was He less than omnipotent? Temptation whispered once to him that the Jewish cause was hopeless in the beginning, and that he had

been a victim, not a contributor to the ruin. He threw back his head and spoke aloud: "Almighty One, deliver me from the cowardice of my thought. I am the guiltiest of all."

That morning broke into many a sorrowful place in Babylon, but into none where the bitterness of heart was equal to Ariel's. The scales were gone from his eyes. And there were seams in his face which were not there yesterday when, about the second hour after sunrise, a guard, with an inscrutable countenance, struck the butt of his spear against the outer door:

"Majesty summons the son of Levi to the gardens."

Yet, as he went, followed closely by the messenger, he was more afraid of himself than of that which he went to see.

On a low divan, on the floor beneath the widest, because the lowest circle of arches, looking out toward the Temple of Belus and the bridge of Babylon, lay the king. He was fully awake, a thing unusual for him at such an hour. Behind him stood a semicircle of attendants, all very straight and very still. In the middle, a pace in front of the others, stood four judges of the Magian order, wearing white robes and flying circles upon their breasts. Right at the head of the divan sat the Lady Ista. It sprang to Ariel's mind that she, too, must have come in answer to a summons. Over the whole group, even the slaves, who stood out from each end of the semicircle, there was that stoic calm which was the studied air of the courtly classes. Ista was pale, her eyes were unnaturally bright, but

beyond those betrayals of agitation she gave no sign. She gave the Jew the merest glance as he came up before the lounge. His quaking limbs seemed about to refuse their burden, but he forced himself on, and bowed to the king, and then to the judges. There was no return of the salutation. Belshazzar's murky eyes were rolling upon him:

"Jew, stand you there at the foot of the lounge. It is an honor rarely given to one of another race. The king is constrained, this morning, to punish one who, like yourself, is a Jew. He has offended; justice is sure. It seemed to the king, in mercy toward the culprit, that the presence of one of his own breed might lighten his castigation."

"Thanks, oh, Majesty."

The eyes narrowed, the edge of a smile shone through the beard and was gone. Then, to the slaves:

"Bring the implement."

From somewhere near, they carried out an object which was as simple as the mind which devised it was remorseless; a square wooden base, from which a post of the thickness of a handbreadth arose to the height of a tall man's armpit. Its top was a slender point, lately scraped to a finer sharpness. The thing was planted in front of the lounge, out scarcely twice the length of Belshazzar's arm. He glanced at Ariel:

"Bring the guilty one."

Six slaves came from the depths of the chamber under the arch, carrying a stretcher, over which a

sheet was thrown, concealing what they bore. They set the stretcher down beside the stake and stood silent.

"Son of Levi, witness now, that neither race nor age is without the ancient laws of Babylonia. Remove the cloth!"

The slaves rolled back the sheet.

"Enos!" burst from Ariel's blanched lips, as he saw the bald head and the great white beard. The jeweler was bound immovably to the frame of the stretcher. His face was toward Ariel, but there was no sign of recognition. He looked at the stake, then his eyes drew upward and gazed fixedly, as if he saw something away above him.

"Rachel," he murmured, "Rachel——" His voice was like the voice of a child. "Rachel——" A smile broke over his countenance, disclosing the toothless gums.

"What says he, Jew?" Belshazzar asked.

"He utters the name of a woman."

The king made a gesture to the attentive slaves, a curiously slight gesture to produce so much. He moved his forefinger, still with his eyes on the Jew. And the Jew saw the light burden taken up and turned face downward, two slaves at each side, one at the head and one at the feet. Then it was hoisted directly over the implement, at the full reach of the thick brown arms. Belshazzar had raised upon his elbow:

"Now, Jew, look well. And you, my Ista." She had turned her face away. Now she looked at the stake

again. The royal forefinger, upheld for a moment, flipped down. The six slaves, all with the same movement, flung their weight downward upon the figure they held poised. Down upon the point they drove it, and there was a stifled, strangled cry, and one only, for the sharp end came through the middle of the back and stood half its length above. The limbs convulsed, bound as they were, then drooped and hung still. One other twitch of the royal finger, and the slaves bore away the corpse and the stake, and a thick green mat was unrolled over the spatter of blood by the side of the lounge. Belshazzar set his gold-latched sandals upon it as he arose to a sitting posture:

“See, Jew, how easy it is for a Jew to die!”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Hast heard of the fate of our brother Enos?” cried Ansil, as he burst into the patriarch’s room a little later.

“Enos? What hath God permitted to befall him?”

“Impaled, in the gardens, an hour ago. Half the court was there, Ariel with them!”

“Impaled! It is a cruel death. Our Father, teach us to submit. Was he charged?”

“I can not learn. What of Ariel? He should know. But where is he? I hear that he is with the king’s strumpet at all times, day and night.”

“Ansil, I do not know. It may be he hath fallen somewhat under the spell of sin. So many do; I thought of it when we let him go.”

“Can he have betrayed us? It must be! How else

came our blameless brother to such an end? I tell thee, Daniel, this youth hath delivered us to the enemies as sheep to the butcher's pen!"

"And where were we before, dear brother?"

"Life was ours; now we shall be given death to taste. Oh, heaven, when shall this abomination pass!"

Daniel stood up: "Brother, I know not the hour, but I tell thee the time is near. Death! Are we not already dead? We, who can not worship our God as we would, or live as we ought? Death! Learn, my Ansil, that death is not the evil of evils. This is the evil of evils—to live evilly and not to die. Oh, send the word to all the leaders to call the people together this night, here, in my garden. I have that which I have waited long to tell them. The time hath come."

"So soon after what happened this morning?"

"As I say, this night."

No such congregation of Jews had taken place since the sack of Jerusalem. They filled the garden and overran adjacent plots and alleys. Men, women, children, merchants and tradesmen of all degrees, laborers who were slaves in truth, all brought together by word of the death of the beloved Enos and the portentous summons of Daniel. Each, arriving, was surprised and many were alarmed to find the garden brilliantly lighted with lanterns hung upon the trees.

"Is Daniel mad?" a rug merchant asked of an old man who was peering about.

"Son, still thy tongue. This Daniel is the Voice of the Lord."



The patriarch appeared upon the little balcony, overlooking the hundreds. He was in spotless white, a habit which no one there ever had seen him wear. He spread forth his hands and his lips moved, yet he spake no word that any one could hear. Then:

“Brethren, sisters, ye, sweet little ones, if I tell ye that great changes are almost come in Babylon, I tell because I know. Ask me not how. Some of ye fear that danger is near. It may be so. But I command that every one of ye convert his goods into treasure which can be carried; then hide the treasure, so that none saving thee can find it. Do ye this with all possible quickness, for I say to ye *the deliverance is at hand!*”

Over the crowd went a ripple of incredulity. Some one asked his neighbor, “Hath the son of Levi brought the good news?” Daniel waved his hands: “Depart now to thy homes, and if there be one among ye who doubts his duty let him tremble lest God smite him.”

Wondering and whispering, they dispersed as quickly as they had come.

## CHAPTER XXV

### SHE OF THE HAIR OF GOLD

THE murder of Enos did not slake the monarch's rage. Contrarily, the sup it gave to his vengeance made the thirst the hotter. At midday he sent for Blastus and the blind one knew by premonition that something had gone ill. The leading girls were not beyond earshot when the king burst out: "Ista has had the dog from the West in charge how long?"

"As Majesty knows, it is——"

"Yea, and what knows she?"

"Only that the Jews contrive for a movement. They seem to make no preparation for any bloodshed. The leader's name she does not learn, but even that shall come."

"Even that! Damnation upon this business. Hark ye, Blastus, the royal patience is run dry. Tell me, by the sunset of to-morrow, who the leader is and what the reptiles mean. If you do it not, another takes the rank and the Jew goes to earth. This night Ista sits again by the footstool. Speak of her, for any service henceforth, and banishment shall be your answer. Hear you?"

The blind lids worked: "The servant hears." He signaled for his girls.

"Speed," he hissed, as they led him out. Almost running as they held him, he plunged into his own

little domain and shrilled out to his page: "Fly, out to the nearest guard and command them to bring the Jew, Ariel."

Those who sought for Ariel did not find him. Half crazed with grief at what he had witnessed, he had wandered down into the city, penetrating to the northward, along the river avenue, watching the little ferries cross and recross with their loads, and thinking, as he watched, what a joy it were, if he could become one of the slaves who manned them—a stout body, a heart unseared by the deeper sorrows and a mind callous to its humble state.

His courtly clothing attracted the gaze of all he met. Children, with baskets, turned aside to give him room. The action made the weight on his conscience heavier. He, so he felt, should have turned aside for them—little beings, doing honest work, while he—.

The merciless hours dragged chains across his bare heart. Every sound was a curse in his ears. The sun seemed, as at Ajalon, to halt in the mid-sky, that remorse might be denied the dawn of another day.

Folks of all nations, and now and again a Jew, met him as he wandered on, and whenever he met a Jew he shrank still further within himself. He longed to go to Daniel, but he dared not brave the meeting. He turned into a little public house, close by the inner wall, and rested a while. Then he went on again, and entered a district different from any he had ever seen. The houses were one story high, mere sheds, set close together upon the narrowest streets he had seen in

Babylon. Men sat by the doorways, idle but alert. He caught low exclamations behind him, and heard, once, a hail in guttural Aramaic. He made no response, for he knew that he had penetrated one of the lowest of quarters, peopled by a mixture of the baser classes, and unsafe for the uninitiated to enter. He wondered at himself, that, in his wretchedness, he still clung so fondly to life. For he hurried out of the place, and along the first broad avenue toward the royal center.

Darkness was falling as he came back into the neighborhood he knew. He waited, below the north face of the elevation, until he was sure the crowd must be assembled in the throne room. When, at last, he crept up the steps and joined the numbers within, he soon caught a whisper, flying from mouth to ear.

He did not know that the king's anger against him and his jealousy of the Lady Ista had overturned the best-laid plans of the noble Kadric, and of the bustling matron in the Garden of Love, and that the call of the girl with the hair of gold to appear before the king had been deferred until this day. His Majesty had summoned her, at last, thinking, with her as the instrument, to chastise Ista.

"She is coming, yonder, she will appear in a moment." "A Jewess, they say." "A girl with golden hair." Men and women bent curious eyes upon the deep-set, doubly guarded door which led through the body of the mansion to the harem.

In the little time that she was left alone before she was to be led out, the daughter of Lael had repeated

all the prayers she knew. When the chief of the eunuchs came for her, she stepped out to meet him. At the door of the throne room, Gur received her, and walked directly after her as she went forward.

There was a buzz of wonder and admiration. The scant rich gown of a royal bride set to her form. Her paleness made marble of the adorable stamp of her features. And there was something in her look which made those who saw her, stare, each asking himself: "What thought is hidden there?"

As the eunuch left her, at the lowest step of the dais, and backed away, the king leaned forward and the spectators pressed in. Many the bride had stood there but not one had been of that angelic type of loveliness. Ariel was struck as by a blow. Here was his own race represented. Here, again, the tragedy of Jewish flesh and Jewish spirit under the Pagan heel. He stifled a moan.

"What name is yours, girl?" asked Belshazzar.

"Ivah, the daughter of Lael."

Ariel moved to the forefront of the group of watchers.

"Ah, a Jewess indeed. Look up at me, pretty one."

Ivah sank to her knees and raised her hands in the sign of supplication. "Oh, King, have pity; let me steal away and run to my mother and father."

It was a wild sharp cry and it struck the court with the electric power of surprise. The king's eyes glistened with astonishment. The queen trembled and Kadric, who was near the cedar, retreated three paces

and cursed in Aramaic. The son of Levi stood as one transfixed, thrilled with a sudden pride.

The king looked down at Ista, sitting at his left hand. She was watching Ariel. Seeing the change in his look, something in her own turned suddenly bitter.

"My Ista, shall we strip the spitfire and have her skin decorated with the bull's hide?"

"Nay, Majesty."

"Or send her to the pits?"

"Nay, Majesty."

"What, then? Shall I condemn her to—myself?"

"Aye, that should be the punishment," muttered Kadric, overjoyed to see the mood of the monarch turning upon the hinge of humor.

Belshazzar laughed aloud, a thing he rarely did. "It is done. The sentence is upon you, binding you prisoner to the royal suite. Hist, slaves, bring up a bowl of the oldest wine; we will make her temper mellow."

Ivah had not spent her days in the Garden of Love without imbibing some of the meaning of that jargon by which the unstemmed license of court thought was connoted. She knew the meaning of the doom she heard spoken, and at its last word she sprang up, with the ferocity of a tigress, so suddenly that the monarch started and threw his hands before his averted face.

"Ye beasts, you that hunt down helpless women—" she spun about and hurled the words at the close packed amphitheater of the crowd; scores upon scores of bright black eyes, wide open, scores upon scores of brows

lifted in astonishment—"thinkest thou a Hebrew virgin is afraid to die, thou wild dogs!" Unconsciously, the Babylonian tongue left her and she was shrieking in Hebrew: "Put me to death; tear out my heart, it is clean; but I tell ye, I will be no concubine. I hate ye, and I dare ye all!"

Not one in the chamber understood the words of the outburst, excepting Ariel. The whole situation was plain to his mind, in a flash, and his heart leapt up, and his soul was stirred with an unspeakable inspiration. There was a moment of stony silence, which the Lady Ista was the first to break:

"Majesty, the young Jew, Ariel, stands yonder. He could interpret this storm, maybe."

"You that are called the son of Levi, come forward and tell what the she-wolf shrieks in her own tongue."

The gleam of that clean soul, ready to die, nay, wooing death—for the outburst was nothing less—for a virtue well-nigh forgotten in the realm, struck him like a wand. The air of its magic was plain upon him as, with the quietness of a swift determination, he stepped to her side. A pity, deep beyond all sounding, a wish to befriend which outran all prudence, surged through him. He spoke low, and in their own language:

"Be brave, thou daughter of Israel; I, too, am Hebrew, and thy companion in their hatred."

She fell upon the steps, sobbing out a chain of broken words. Ariel bowed to the cedar: "Oh, Majesty, the lady was overcome at sight of the court.

Her senses were turned, and she cried out, first in Aramaic, then in Hebrew, and asked to be released. She is ill."

"You lie, you spawn of slaves."

Ariel arose to his full stature: "My God has heard me, Majesty. If I have lied, my punishment is sure."

The daughter of Lael looked up, and the white despair of the splendid face was transformed, as the face of a weeping child changes at sight of a trifle. He dropped on his knee beside her:

"Plead illness; resist him cautiously; I know not how to save thee, but I will try; if I fail, I will die in the trial. Be brave."

The only response was another storm of weeping. The king and the court looked on, in astonishment, fast turning to anger. Ista had watched the Jew as he came out. She had read the look in his face as he spoke, and the attitude as he answered the royal insult.

"Why bent he down so long?" Belshazzar asked of the paramour.

"Her face is fair, oh, Majesty; it might be that."

The king directed the waiting slaves to take the Jewess back to the Garden of Love, there to await some punishment fitting a sin such as hers. At the same time Ariel, surcharged with a new purpose, which, in its wildness, outdid any he had formed, pressed through the ominous crowd and out of the nearest door on the south. Ista's small white teeth ground behind her stained lips as she saw him moving away.

On the esplanade two guards closed in:



"Son of Levi!"

"I am so called."

"Come with us, and quietly. Blastus commands."

The blind man stepped down from his seat as the Jew was brought before him, and he stood facing him, with an expression so intent and determined that the prisoner fancied that eyes, keen seeing eyes, were hidden somewhere under the drawn brows.

"Now, Jew, the hour is come. Grace of life, or a death, sure but not sudden, awaits you. You have dared show emotions toward the Lady Ista. You are betrayed."

Ariel was speechless for a little while. The soft measured chuckle of the clepsydra against the wall and the deep breathing of the guards were plain to the ear. Then he replied, steadily:

"If the Lady Ista has betrayed me, she has served her masters well. I send her a message, the last. Say to her that I do not love her; that I never loved her; that though she and I were alone on earth, and lived a thousand years, I could not love her, save as beast loves beast. My eyes have been opened upon myself. Tell her that I do love some one—a maiden whose tresses she is not fit to braid, and that our love shall survive and triumph, when she and all her race are damned. Tell Ista that!"

The Spider smiled, a wicked brief baring of the teeth. He had not spoken with Ista. His claim that she had betrayed the Jew was a lie, concocted in haste and rich in dangers. But his favor under the crown,

his life even, might hang upon a quick discovery of the Jewish plot entire. He gave not a sign of his agitation:

“You went to the lion park alone, with her. The deed of itself condemns you. Yet, there is one way left.”

“What way is that?”

He thrust his face close up to the Jew's: “Deliver to me the name of every man in this conspiracy, from the head of them downward, and all their plannings. I must know that the Lady Ista erred not. Give it all, and you go free, beyond the gates. Do less, and you shall learn how very much a man may suffer before he dies.”

The prisoner's flesh crept and a bright red spot burned on each cheek. If Ista had betrayed him, why was Blastus so eager? Perhaps she had not; perhaps she would not; heaven might intercede. As for himself, before the proposal was fully made his mind had leapt beyond it and turned back. He was unconscious of any temptation. His answer sprang upon the very heels of the Spider's last word:

“It is to betray my race that the wise Blastus proposes?”

“It is to do what I have said; not less.”

The young form straightened. The guards tightened their hold of his arms and stood a little apart from him, so bright were his eyes and so tense the muscles under their palms.

“You, Spider, called the Wise for courtesy; you

would bribe a Hebrew of the Hebrews to betrayal of his people! You are a fool. Your promise is a lie, and a coward makes it. Now do your worst!"

The blind lids opened and closed again and the lips sagged in a manner at which the guards recoiled. When he spoke it was five short words, in a choking whisper:

"To the pits with this."

Ariel was hurried out of the den, around the west end of the palace, into a corridor and down steps, worn in the center by the feet of the gods knew how many unfortunates. The low dark cellars were thick with mold. An old turnkey, with a face like a ferret, preceded them, unbolting gates and shuffling on, holding up a smoking torch to light their way. Their progress was eastward, under the center of the place.

Even in his rage, the Spider did not forget to send the gist of Ariel's message straight to Ista's ears.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE HOST LED OUT

**A**T this time epochal events were slowly shaping themselves. As is the frequent way of such events, they made no very deep impression in the minds of most of those who saw them.

Nabonidus, father of Belshazzar, having seated his son on the throne and clothed him with almost every function of the scepter, went himself upon a voyage, even to the head of the gulf to the southward, to inspect a chain of engineering works, then near completion. The journey was made with that pomp and leisure befitting a king retired. When he came again to his city it was to hear a piece of news which touched the pride, rather than the fear, in his royal heart.

A thin and scattered line of Persian soldiery, which, for months, had infested the region out beyond the northern wall, had suddenly appeared to grow in numbers, to gain a more decisive leadership and to prepare for action. Now the enemy was wheeling and dragging toward the moat the rude machinery of siege.

Half a year before these circumstances Cyrus, whom the world already was beginning to call the Great, had conquered the hosts of Croesus and claimed the Lydian kingdom as his own. This done, he started westward, with his eyes on Babylon, a vastly richer prize.

Midway from Ecbatana to the Euphrates, as he rode before his cohorts, it had pleased him to cross the river Gyndes at the head of all his host, since one of his generals, halting on the bank, had questioned the safety of the ford. One of his chargers, overlooked by the god to which he had committed it, set foot in a little well of quicksand and stumbled. The fright of the other brought confusion and though a hundred attendants rushed to aid, the noble brute drowned before it could be untangled from its harness.

The Persian heart was thorough. Cyrus convened his generals on the west bank and there swore mainly that whatsoever heathen stream slew horse of his should suffer as stream had never suffered theretofore. He sent the forward half of the army onward, to make ready for siege; himself, with the other half, remained to oversee the retribution of the waters. It was no perfunctory task. Innumerable ditches were dug above the ford, diverting the stream to that extent that when, at last, the interrupted expedition marched, the Gyndes ceased above the place of the accident and a heap of stones bore witness to the triumph.

When the conqueror reached the plain above the city and took command of his forces, then did the archers along the north wall see a change in the numbers and behavior of the troops. Then did Nabonidus, just returned, begin to think of the sword, which he had thought to wield no more. He counseled with his royal son:

“The Persian wasps would sting us, oh, son. By

the loins of Bel, I am minded to issue forth at the head of a division and show these pygmies what men can do."

Belshazzar, in whom the military spirit was a shadow only, deferred: "It is needless, Sire. There stand the walls. If the birds from the East will peck, their bills are their own."

"Nay, son; I love not the noise of the pecking. I will go forth, and by the sword-hand of Nebo, they that came so gallantly out of Lydia shall feel how it is to toil, barebacked, under the beaded lash. The decree, son, issue the decree."

Thus came it that the king's command went forth that every soldier in Babylon, excepting them that guarded the royal square, hold himself ready for immediate action, under the Royal Nabonidus.

Ten days afterward, such was the simplicity of preparation, that which had the appearance of a well equipped army was arrayed along the edge of the northern district, west of the river and just within the rampart.

For days the archers, who filled every tower, had been exchanging irregular shots with the archers of the enemy. Sometimes a man, thrust through and dead, or dying, would be toppled from the windows of his turret to the ground. Then another archer would go up by a ladder and take his place. Sheaves of arrows were hoisted by ropes to those who needed them. Intermittent flights of steel-tipped shafts, shot from beyond the moat, clattered like hail against the

brickwork. Those that missed, hissing over, dropped perilously among the troops. Though the wall was between the armies, that of Nabonidus had the feeling which is, of all feelings, the hardest for the soldier to endure—that of being exposed to a foe against whom, for the time, he can not fight. The men were eager for combat. They knew nothing of the plans of their commander. He reviewed them, riding from end to end of their massed lines, gorgeous in the jeweled mail which had been his father's, but he said no word.

Night came. From the moat and the many canals above it a mist arose. Then a low-spoken order passed from captain to captain. The palm gates, which for many weeks had been closed behind the brass, were rolled back, almost noiselessly. The brazen leaves were unfolded, so gently that their creaking was scarcely heard. The wooden bridges, lying within the walls, were moved, as silently, to their places. Then, through each gate, stealthily as bodies of men can go, the Babylonians poured out. Every portal vomited its solid stream, eight abreast, an officer at stated intervals. As the last of each column passed over, the bridge by which it crossed was hauled back through the aperture and the gate of brass and the gate of wood were closed. For Nabonidus was not a coward. He was going out to fight, and he chose to put both moat and wall between himself and succor. More than this, at the same hour every gate of Babylon was made fast. That grim precaution shut out many a trading expedition *homeward bound*, some near and some afar. Of one

of these, and what befell it, more shall appear before the tale is told.

The commander dared believe his army had emerged unknown to the enemy. So quietly was the thing accomplished, and so heavy was the fog that the hope was not foolishness. Nonetheless it was mistaken. Persian outposts, stationed far in toward the moat, saw the vanguard coming and retreated, carrying word to their generals up the valley. As the news sped through the bivouac and on into the main camp soldier after soldier, thousand after thousand, turned out from sleep and made ready for instant action. Learning of the manner of the Babylonian exit, Cyrus commanded the utmost silence as his army formed for defense. As it was the expectation of Nabonidus to take the enemy by surprise, so was it the design of Cyrus to lead the outcoming host as far as might be from the rampart, hoping to cut off retreat. He did not reckon that the Babylonian would scorn to flee back into the safety which he left so stealthily.

Accordingly, the Persian line was drawn up just below its permanent quarters. Row after row of men, their spears bristling, short swords at every belt, shields ready on arms. They were bidden to sit, the spears extended. The east end of the line was cautiously moved southward, many a stadium. There the strongest arms of the command were stationed. In due time it, too, halted and waited.

Brief as was the warning of the attack, the Persian had his plan; absurdly simple, old even then, yet a



stratagem by which many a field, before and since, was won.

The last end of night was going when the Persians of the main line heard, a little way through the fog, the low and sharp commands of generals, urging forward their men. Then came the crunching of feet and the creaking of shield holds. Every waiting soldier arose on his right knee; his left foot extended; his spear braced. Nothing but a ribbon of fog divided the hosts.

Then, in the moment when Nabonidus, riding in the midst, believed that he saw the tents in the distance and dreamed of a blow like that which felled the Midianites aforetime, there burst commands from the vapor just ahead. From end to end of the Persian ranks it ran, sharp, cruel, exultant:

“Forward spears!”

Like steel springs loosed from coil the Persians leapt. The Babylonians, taken aback, had scarce realized the surprise when lances were against them. In a moment the plain was a sea of fighting. Foe grappled with foe, half seen. Lances were driven through the bodies of living and of dead. Yells, groans and the raw stench of blood arose. Cyrus, in his own line, was delivering orders with tense precision. Nabonidus, whose main line was rolled back many paces by the first assault, shouted his loudest and called his generals by name. Then fierce cries of victory went up from his own men, left and right, and he thrilled, *knowing the enemy was falling back. He shouted the*

names of the greater gods as he felt his line advance, and knew in his heart that the foe had turned, to be pursued to utter rout.

Suddenly the eastern wing was crumpled back to the westward. The pressure upon it became a charge. Caught, as grain is caught in the curve of a sickle, the Babylonians first staggered, then broke into retreat at full speed. Terror seized on that part of the army which was under the voice of Nabonidus. Humiliated by the unexpected stroke from the right, but still believing that, with daylight, he could turn and chastise them, he ordered the retreat—which then was fully in progress—and with his shattered column fell back toward the southwest. Swarming in pursuit, the enemy harried his rear guard with deadly thrust and overhand blow of mace.

The sun peeped over the plain; the fog moved, like a dull monster, and in the space of a hand's waving began to tear to pieces. It rolled from the face of the field, discovering the dead by hundreds, lying as if cast up by a flood. Some were transfixed and still alive; some reeled or crawled about, crying for water. Over toward the northwest corner of the rampart, Persian legions were driving their enemies before them as a gale drives dust, and the path was thick with corpses. The pursuing force was the greater in numbers; in discipline it was beyond comparison.

The contagion of demoralization caught Nabonidus himself. A vestige of his pride made him forbear to seek access to his own city, but he retreated down

past the western wall, to Borsippa, and pressed in, taking the remnant of his army with him. The gates were barricaded and Nabonidus, in his sorrow, took himself to wine, while the garrison took the wall. And through Borsippa sped the word that the Persians were armed with devils and lightnings, before which the swords of men were as the toys of children.

The next day and the next the pursuers belabored the gates. Though far inferior to those of Babylon, they were able to resist assault of this kind. Thereupon Cyrus, leaving a force to guard Borsippa against communication with her greater neighbor, returned to camp with the main division, to bring up catapults and rams, preparatory to a determined storming of the northern wall.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE PITS

**T**HE pits, as the warrens of cells beneath the palace were called, were more like digged wells than like cells in a common prison. The Babylonian mind ran largely to the practical. It was a sinister token of the mercies of that age that the loveliest part of the royal square, the esplanade at the east of the palace, was honeycombed far under its polished floor with holes in which offenders of all degrees endured their miseries, lost in the soundless depths of their immurement. Past the square the quays ceased and the walls were sheer. Dotting the west one, just above the water's edge, ran a row of little square windows, heavily grated. He who looked for a time would see ravens flutter over the water, perch on the ledges, disappear within and afterward emerge and fly away.

Each window gave into a cell full ten feet deep and no more than five paces square. The builders, lavish in dimensions above ground, made the dungeons with combined economy and heartlessness.

Behind that outmost row of pits was a narrow gallery, lighted by windows in the back walls of the cells. Then, backward, tier after tier, they stretched in the same order. Comparative darkness in the first few rows became midnight itself farther under the huge foundations. It was the system of the place that crim-

inals who, for any purpose, were to be saved alive, were confined nearest the stream, where the light and the air were better. Farther back were the utterly condemned. For Babylonian justice looked upon the stake and the spear thrust as the milder of its punishments. Those committed to death by slow starvation, or by thirst, or by the retention of the body in one position until the end, were not unusual tenants of the darkness behind the outer tier.

To one held nearest the river there was a certain ingenuity of torture, for, day and night, he could hear the movement of life on the stream above him but he could gain no glimpse of it. He could see the top of the window grating, if he stood with his back to the farther wall; by the movement of the shadows of the bars about the little chamber he might learn to reckon the time. That was all; for the walls were sheer and of massive structure.

As Ariel was led through the passage after the turnkey, sounds arose on both sides. The soft beating of fists against bricks; squeals, like rats give when they are struck; sometimes idiotic laughter came to his ears. Neither old Galeel, the turnkey, nor the guards gave the slightest heed.

Turning down the corridor at the farther end the old man opened a door. There was a chattering of teeth inside. He shut the door again.

"Not yet? It is passing strange," said a guard.

"Yea," croaked the turnkey. "He was a boy, as you might say, when he came. He is old now. Met

by night, he never would pass for man. But his place is near to vacancy; I know that light in his eyes."

"What crime was his?" asked the other guard.

"It slips my mind; some evil deed in Nebuchadnezzar's time."

Over such things as these the king's musicians played and the minions wasted the hours.

The turnkey fumbled the lock of the next cell door. The bolts were rusted. Webs of the spider's stretching tore apart as the door swung inward. Ariel was thrust inside, and before his eyes were anywise accustomed to the faint light, iron manacles were snapped about his wrists. That on the right was so tight that the guard pressed its jaws between his palms before they caught. Then he was left alone.

Chains, running from the manacles to staples, knowingly placed above his head, made it impossible for him to lie down. Added to this condition, there now came an intensifying pain in the right wrist. What at first was a kind of numbness swiftly became terrible. He clanked at his chains and yelled but there was no answer. Then nausea came, then fainting, then the return of reason. Hanging upon his chains, half senseless, he dreamed fantastic dreams. In one of them he seemed to be led by a great black angel, whose fingers circled his wrist with a fiery clutch. He was dragged through the east gate, into the khan in Jerusalem, and there sat Nana, beside the door-beam, holding her harp and singing. The angel vanished as the girl looked up. He stretched out his arms, but as she

saw, her face turned all at once to the whiteness of horror, and she shrieked and fled from him.

\* \* \* \* \*

While his sire went forth against the enemy, Belshazzar waited, in his own suite and in his own way. He had commanded that when his father should have conquered the enemy, all the gates should be flung wide and the army, in its triumphal entry, welcomed with honors such as had not been seen since Nebuchadnezzar's death. Until the victory was sure, he decreed, no word of the progress of the battle should be brought him. The first day passed, the second, the third, and he kept his seclusion. Then he asked for Blastus:

"I seek no news of the battle; I ask only after my father's person. Is he dead?"

"We believe him alive, Sire."

"Where?"

"He went into Borsippa."

The relief which came to the son was instantaneous. Being in Borsippa, his father was not entirely defeated. Perhaps he was merely executing a stratagem. In any case he could not be in desperate straits, for Borsippa the Fair was but another Babylon, differing only in its scale.

The mind of the king was one of them which, having suffered, though slightly, must at once seek some living and feeling object of retribution.

"Since you are in presence, Blastus, what of the Jews?"

The blind one shivered. The king had not yet

called him to account as to the Jewish situation. He had devised a lie, but he hoped to avoid the use of it; not that a lie was dreadful for its own sake; this one, he feared, might be discovered.

"They are turning their possessions into property of slight bulk, Majesty."

"And hiding it, as you said before?"

"Yes, in their gardens, under the lintels, everywhere. But they are watched."

"And you know the whole of their plotting?"

"Thanks to the Lady Ista, I do, oh, King."

"There is no mistake as to the leader? But, might he not execute some magic? Were it not better to strike one heavy blow, and have the disease put down forever?"

"Whenever Majesty wills, the leaders can be brought to punishment. They could all be lodged in the pits before the sun sets."

"But, can you doubt that every one has his sympathizers? The ulcer reaches to every man of the race. And," the royal eyes narrowed, "has it not occurred to you that there may be some understanding between them and the army at the north? Say not that it is not so; the king has revelations: I see Jews, signaling by magic to the army; I see the king, warned of it by the gods; I see a host, going forth in the night, striking down the dogs in their houses and their haunts; then I see years of peace."

Blastus said no more. He saw the working of the royal jest, and knew that the massacre was near.



"And that young hound in the pits; I will have him up for a word. Wait here."

Very soon afterward, very pale, trembling on his legs, but fully conscious, the son of Levi was led in, escorted by a pair of lusty keepers, and followed, at a little distance, by old Galeel, the turnkey. Belshazzar looked him over, cool, and in no haste:

"My guest's color is weak. The light in the pits seems feeble at first, but there are those who have lived long by it."

Ariel kept silence.

"And one of his wrists is inflamed. The gyves fit ill at first, but nature is kind. The limb will wither, till the iron fits as if it were forged to the measure."

Ariel made no reply.

"Let my guest's heart be as merry as his body is comfortable. A signal honor is reserved for him. He shall be the last male of his race to be left alive in Babylon, and his death shall be an occasion of royal patronage."

Ariel smiled, a quick eager smile, almost wistful:

"Will Majesty be present when I die?"

"Nothing shall prevent."

"My thanks for that. Once you showed me how a Jew could die. I will show *you* how a Jew can die, Belshazzar, you drunken clown, you strumpet's toy. I laugh in your face. You can not hurt me; I will live forever!"

What was wonted composure on the besotted face was driven out by a ghastly pallor. The eyes pro

truded; he leapt to his feet, quivering, and his right hand shot to his girdle, where a dagger hung naked from a cord. Then he clapped his hands to his ears, and shrieked to Blastus:

“Take it away, away, away, till the king himself invents the punishment!”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### AS TAMMUZ CAME

**T**HE month called Tammuz, the modern July, came on with little visible change within the city. All the gates were fast, indeed, and little garrisons stood behind them; but Babylon seldom saw its gates. The northern rampart was peopled with archers, ensconced in the towers, to send winged peril to any Persian coming near enough to warrant the chances of the bow.

Thus watched, Cyrus, assisted by Gobyras, his chief of staff, directed the assembling of the munitions for siege. Stones heavy enough to be hurled with effect by the catapult were nowhere to be found in the loan of the valley. But above the river gate there were low walls, made of brick as heavy as stone. These, workmen were set to tearing out.

As the turrets commanded both the moat and the foot of the wall below them, the difficulties of attack were formidably plain. But he who had conquered the East had not expected to conquer the West in a day. In systematic fashion he organized his working forces; sent horses and men to the hills for stouter timbers; set carpenters to building portable bridges and rams—in a word he prepared to cross the moat and assail in earnest the masonry which had withstood the world.

His early belief that the gates could be successfully

stormed was heavily shaken, after some half-dozen sallies had been made against them. The bowmen were relatively safe in their perches above. Those of the Persian, approaching without protection, gave to the marksmen targets both broad and tall. The moat forbade the use of fire. Those who plunged into the stream found no landing place on the inner side. They were mown down, in the water, and the defenders shot at the bodies, for sport, as they drifted.

Among the numerous virtues of Cyrus, patience was not exalted. These reverses doubled his energy of preparation. A mighty assault, against one gate, his whole force focused upon one point, the action covered by his archers, operating on each wing—this was the plan to which he hastened every available force.

Then the unaccustomed heat and dampness of the region spread a sickness in his camp. Hardy as his soldiers were, they weakened. Many died. The stream ran down to the city level with its banks and the water supply, drawn from shallow wells, was really the river water. So men were set to dig deeper and to wall the digging with timbers. To the rude engineering of the times the task was great; its results imperfect. Thus, very early, Cyrus saw that the obstacles in the way of his capture of the stronghold were greater than he had believed them. Like a wise man, he acknowledged the mistake to himself, without comment to others, and set about to right it as he could. But his heart burned with a stronger wrath toward the city. The wish that he might, by a swift stroke, hush forever the mouths

of them that mocked his labors from the turrets, flashed over him hotly and often. But as often as it came the practical intellect put it aside. The determined, concentrated siege, with the archers covering the attack—he saw no more than this.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE FEAST PROCLAIMED

**G**REATEST of all festivals of Babylon was that of Tammuz, the Sun God. Visitors were wont to come from both ends of the valley, even from distant countries, to see the gorgeous spectacles, and to study, mostly by sharing, the boundless excesses which all authorities indulged during the time of its observance. Hundreds, arriving months before the date, went safely into the city. Other hundreds, coming later, found the gates fast. Every one of these was captured, and the jackals down the river fattened accordingly.

Early in the month Belshazzar convened his privy councilors, his lords and his captains, and asked minutely after the movements of the Persian. As one, they gave assurance that the city was secure. The enemy were smitten by distempers. Vultures darkened the sky above their camp. Any morning the outposts on the walls expected to see the beginning of the exodus.

Thus reassured, the king did last what his ancestors would have done first. He summoned Arbec, chief of the priests, to learn what the stars portended.

In his conical cap and his blue gown, blazoned with the crescent and the planets above it, Arbec came, clasping the winged circle of gold which was the emblem of the Magian order.

“The time of the beginning of the feast is come,

oh, Arbec. Shall the rites be held? What is the mood of the deities?"

The face of the priest was very grave. However the moderns may smile at them, and crass impostors as they often were, these star-gazers of old believed much in the knowledge they professed, and, out of it, augured strangely.

"Majesty, the heavens do perplex us. We have seen the birth of a new star in the right segment of the southern hemisphere. It seems that the feast shall go well, yet blood shall flow."

Belshazzar's eyes grew bright: "Arbec, even the wisdom of the order knows not everything. \*I bless the gods; they send me a friendly sign. Blood *shall* flow, yet shall Babylon be unharmed. Say the stars more than this?"

"There shall be turmoil, weeping, confusion."

Again the king smiled: "I have so willed; the feast shall be."

"Majesty, the temple obeys."

"As it comes to mind, there are, I believe, in the treasury, certain basins and other vessels brought from Jerusalem?"

"They are there, oh, King; a mass which has not seen the light since it was cast there by the will of Nebuchadnezzar, saving Majesty, the greatest of the kings."

Belshazzar turned to Kadric: "What say you; shall we drink a last rouse to the Jews in Jewish metal?"

"Why not? By what more gracious favor could a race be bidden farewell, oh, Sire?"

"See that the cups and bowls are prepared, to be a part of the service on the Night of Nights."

"As Majesty commands, so shall it be."

The royal edict for the observance of the feast went forth. It was received with joy in every part of the city, for the fear that the siege might lead to its cancellation had been the gossip, contradicted as often as heard, in every inn, wineshop, cottage and mansion within the four walls. Even the Jews, filled with the belief that great, perhaps awful, events were imminent, and drawn together in that belief, received the word with satisfaction, trusting that evil against them was at the least postponed. Wrapped in a seclusion unknown to them before, they waited, for what they did not know.

In every place the native population and the guests who had come were astir. Walks in front of houses were swept, polished and purified with dust of lime. Barbers hurried from house to house, reaping profits from those who kept no slaves. Dealers in raiment, in ribbon, in cosmetics and perfumes and jewels were as busy as ants in ant hills, made so by the quickening of trade. In hovels little children made rude shell beads. In mansions dark-eyed belles were surrounded by serving maids and the makers of holiday garments. Litters, long files of them, crowded the greater streets.

One standing at the head of the majestic Avenue of the Diadem, stretching south from the palace, might

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have counted a thousand chariots in the space of an hour. Almost an equal number of palanquins would have gone by, on the shoulders of perspiring Ethiopians, blacker than the beads they wore. He would have seen a countless number of dark-eyed, bearded Babylonian men, in all styles of dress but all robed, pressing the baser multitude aside with light canes which distinguished them as gentlemen. He might have seen negroes of mixed blood, rings in ears and on wrists, dashing bareheaded on errands. He could not have overlooked occasional figures, spare and tall, with bronzed skins and the high cheek-bones of the upper country, where the old Turanian stock still held a semblance of its sway. Here and there in the conflicting currents he would have seen a man with a square calm face, protected from the sun by a kind of bonnet, from the sides of which a cape-like covering fell to the shoulders, proclaiming him come from the land of the Pharaohs. Anon a light symmetrical figure, in gray or white, would have appeared and disappeared; a creature with blue eyes and brown-golden hair, and the light of a mind in his face, to tell that Hellas had sent a son to Babylon, in quest of fortune, or philosophy, or love, or anything.

In this medley pedlers of every variety known to East or West writhed, shouted and showed whatever they had. Fruit venders with grapes, pomegranates and melons; wine venders, usually girls, sent out from the nearer shops with pitchers and cups and captivating looks for whosoever would buy; honey gath-

erers, chanting the praises of their wares; jugglers, performing tricks whenever they could cause a circle to halt about them, and snake charmers, carrying brown baskets, from which they could make the asp, or even the hooded cobra, rear its evil head. And here and there, led along boldly and with an eye to business, went a little train of women, in single file, the wrists of each one caught by a bracelet to a small chain, the end of the chain in the hands of a low-browed, dark-skinned lynx of a man. Of the women, some were brazen and indifferent. Some were wistful; some, mere girls, looked out over the rabble with wide eyes full of wonder and terror. In any case, the manacles and the leading chain told the knowing that Babylon's famed slave market was alive.

Ravens and doves were thick above and in the streets. Mothers with their children, all talking, all hurrying, added mass and sound to the multitudes. The very air was loaded with the sense of the eve of the ancient holiday.

Of all who saw such sights as these, at the approach of the first of the Days of Lamentation, not a Gentile did so much as dream that the oncoming Tammuz Feast should be the last.

Within the palace the scene was sharply in contrast with the sound and movement without. A tinge of the old simplicity of the First Days was preserved at court, even in this abandoned reign. Such of the lords and minions as were about at all went softly. Majesty kept much to his private chambers. The gar-

dens were almost deserted. The quiet but systematic toiling of slaves, and that only, was proof that here, as everywhere else, unusual preparations were in the making.

Across the river, in the temple, a crew of selected servants brought out from the treasury an array of splendid and curious objects, the very names of which they did not know, and made them ready for the use of the guests at the king's feast. Minute old Hebrew letters, long hidden by tarnish, came to light under the polishing cloths. The priests, in their chambers, rehearsed that legerdemain with which they annually surprised the throne room. Stocks of incense were prepared. All, even the menials, hurried to the end of all tasks on that afternoon of the twelfth of the month, to be in readiness for the preliminaries of the festival.

It was the same day that Belshazzar called the Spider to his suite:

"You have the Jews under observation?"

"Not a house of theirs but is marked. The guards have been instructed. The word given, four hours and the business shall be done. Yet, Majesty——"

The king raised his hand: "Say it not; Majesty is decided. You think no design of theirs can come to its fruitage beforehand?"

"I think not, oh, King. An unexpected movement among them could be caught in its budding."

"Then will I stay the work until the celebration is over. Three hours before the dawn let the soldiers *fall upon them.*"

"The soldiers will then be drunk."

Belshazzar smiled his little white smile: "Was ever Babylonian too deep in his cups to slay? Should any murmur arise in the city, after the thing is performed, the wine is easy to blame. When the city awakens fully the carrion will be out of view."

"The king's servant hears him."

"That one who is in the pits can serve no further purpose?"

"None, save as his body may give entertainment."

"That is all. Relax nothing in vigilance over him."

To the Lady Ista, the time since Ariel's edged message of denial of his love for her, sent first by a page, and later repeated by Blastus in person, and adorned with venom by him, had reached her understanding, had been a feverish time. She had lost not a moment in telling, first the king, then Blastus, the disconnected story of the Jewish treason, as she had gathered it, bit by bit, from Ariel. Where it lacked coherence, in the Babylonian view, she bridged the gaps with a venom rivaling that of the Spider when he told her of the Jew's scorn. Woman's wit enabled her to make it seem to the king that she had divulged it all as quickly as she could. Woman's hate gave her the colors to paint it deadly black for the son of Levi.

Yet his death was not the goal of her malice. She could not disconnect this change in his mood from his conversation with the daughter of Lael, before the

throne. With all her heart, she studied for some humiliation of both of them; some crucifixion of that martyr's resolve, which she believed she had seen, moving like a storm, and sweeping all his passion for her clean from his nature: a deep wound, to carry with him to his death. With fine audacity, she approached the king:

"That Jew whose name is the Lion of God, Majesty never has told me what is in store for him."

"A punishment, my idol, which shall be sufficient for one who forgot so boldly that the king is the king."

She felt the thrust but the searching eyes of the king could not have seen it, so well she braced herself against it. "Thanks, Majesty." She toyed with the amulet on her bosom. "I was thinking, merely, of a novelty for the feast night."

"Tell the thought."

"The king knows, the king must have seen, how tenderly the Jew bent over the concubine with the yellow hair, the night of her betrothal. What he spoke was in his own tongue, and hers. If it were not an avowal of the fiercest love, then Ista lies."

"Ah," cried the king, his mouth open, his eyes turning from side to side.

"He lost his heart to her the moment he saw her. I saw the light of the Goddess Ishtar on his face, even before Yellowhead rolled on the floor."

"By the bull's wing, I recall that he did bend down, somewhat longer than he should."

"She, too, I hear, is marked for a punishment."

"You hear aright."

"Majesty, there is a dwarf in a booth in the second square to the east, brought up the river for exhibition. I passed the place to-day, and saw him. Never saw I such a being. Nature hesitated in the moment of his creation, and forgot to decide. The beast and the man divide his body between them. If he were brought into the banquet hall, and seated beside this wench, as her bridegroom, and if the Jew were led in and bidden look and see what order of men the women of his race select for mates, the little girl of the footstool wagers the king a score of kisses—anything he wills—that both their faces will be amusing."

Belshazzar tangled the curls of his beard with his nails, looking absently into her eyes. Then he smiled. The Lady Ista knew the meaning of the smile, and she stole away.

If she loved the Jew or not; if she had ever loved him, she never asked her heart. It had been enough that he was handsome, that she had thrown the gossamer snares of her arts and her charms around him, and had seen him fight them, and entangle himself, and surrender, in hot blood and with glorious masculinity. Also, it had been enough that she saw him cast down and trample the infatuation, and heard of his burst of scorn for her and all the Gentile race. There was the rankness of old Turanian tribes in her veins. To it, the gross scheme she had put in the king's mind was a kinder balm than spikenard or

balsam. Now she hugged her dimpled shoulders and was fiercely glad.

Not long afterward Belshazzar had the keeper of the pits brought into his presence.

“The Lord Blastus has given you special charge concerning a young Jew of the name of the son of Levi?”

“Yes, oh, King; that he be guarded closely, and that his body be not harmed.”

“As you regard the breath that is in you, obey.”

## CHAPTER XXX

### DELIVERANCE

**W**HEN the son of Levi was led back to his well, after speech with the king, the walls seemed to nod and the pilasters to twist as he passed them. One of the men put a flask to his lips and he was refreshed a little. He had eaten almost nothing since his seizure. His right wrist, loosed from its bracelet, had swollen frightfully, even in the brief period of its release. The guards, together, were unable to replace the iron, though they gashed the puffed flesh in their efforts. They left it free, locked the other and went their way.

This seemingly slight change was of large use to the prisoner. It permitted him a little room for exploration. In one corner, toward which his back had been turned before, there was a heap of what seemed to be moldering cloth. He had longed for this in the icy chill of nights past. Now, by stretching out his foot, he reached it with one sandal toe and drew it toward him. A part of the mass came away with a clanking sound, revealing a part of a human skeleton. The discovery recalled to him the ravens, which he had seen about the gratings.

He caught up a thigh bone, exulting a moment in the thought that he might fell the keeper and fly through the dim recesses—but where? To the esplanade by day? It would be madness. By night the door to the pits was doubly barred, as he knew.



Another thought came close after the death of the first hope. He twisted the bone about his left arm-chain, close to the staple, and pried. The staple was driven deep, but it had been there long. Again and again he put his weight against the lever. Then, loosening all at once, the iron sprang out and clinked against the wall at the farther side. He snatched it up and stood, considering, already filled with a hope still larger. First, he dragged the remains to their old place and arranged the rotting woolen above them, somewhat as he had found it. Next, he loosened the other staple, for he dreaded lest both arms might be chained up again at the next arrival of his keeper. It he immediately fitted into its sockets again, but with the chain slipped free.

To reach a little grating, set deep in the wall, on a line with the ceiling high above his head, and to do it without blocking or foothold of any kind, was the feat that challenged his ingenuity. Not a fissure appeared in those hard walls. He sounded them with the bone, but he knew that he need never hope, with that poor instrument, to make the least impression upon them. His heart was heavy as he reflected that he had freed his hands to no purpose. He was a captive, as completely as before, and the lessened agony of his body brought a greater agony of the spirit.

The sense of degradation which he suffered, and was yet to suffer, was not the worst of his distress. Nana's song in the khan yard came back to him, line after line, as half forgotten things come back in delirium. He lived over, again and again, the bliss of

the moment when she bent her lips down to him from the little khan window. He could hear his own vows, spoken to her in the darkness, beside her father's door. The faint answering pressure of her hand at parting burned there still. Something of the great family of madness took hold of him, and he fell flat upon the floor, his eyes closed, as though in a swoon.

He spoke no word, not even to himself, but the cry of a soul which had run its length and was ghastly sick was poured out. In the outpouring there was that all-psyche intensity which may transcend the clumsy laws of matter, and, by means a step beyond the reach of Reason, evoke that which is wonderful. His prayer, if it was a prayer, was not for himself, nor for his wronged love, nor yet for the fulfillment of prophecy. It was for the salvation of a race. The cynics of Babylon would have said that he communed with himself alone. A faithful Jew would have said that, in the hour when the last taint of self-seeking was burned out of his heart, the One God heard him and loved him, and became miraculously kind.

A change came over his mood. As a forgotten name will spring to the mind, as if from nothingness, and without a prompting, a thought came to him. With it came the judgment to bide his time until his keeper had come, and gone again. He waited with a calmness amazing even to himself. It had become prophetically clear to him, that which he was to do.

When the keeper did come he found the prisoner crouching at the wall, the left arm-chain on, the staple in. He left a bowl of water and a crust of ~~bread~~

bread. A draught of the water, then the Jew was at his work. He slipped out the staple and tied the ends of the chains together in the closest possible knot. From his left wrist to the end they were longer than the height of his cell. Then he fastened the outer end about the middle of the bone.

Standing with his back toward the west side, he began to toss the rude anchor up against the grating. Again and again he cast. Each time the bone struck crosswise and fell inside. Each time he dreaded lest the sound might penetrate to some one back among the cells, or out upon the stream. His arm wearied and he paused, to rest and to listen. It was evening, and he heard the oars in the water above him. Weird lights glimmered through the grating and danced across the inner face of the wall. The river was crowded now. If he reached the grating—if he forced it, he should only win his freedom to be recaptured.

Considering this, he ate his crust, and drank the last of the water. Then he lay down, and slept. But before sleep came to him; while he was still conscious of the cold foul floor beneath him, and of the perils all about him a panorama was unfolded before his fast shut eyes. As though in a dream he saw a great procession entering Jerusalem, by the old Prison Gate in the east. A multitude went out to meet it. He saw himself in the midst of it, and by his side, on a splendid dromedary, regally caparisoned, rode Nana, the Rose, bowing her head in the happy tumult.

When he awoke the sun had not arisen, but the

gray light was showing through the bars. The keeper would not come down for a time. The first feeding usually was after sunrise. In an instant he was up. At the second cast the bone slipped through the grating. As he drew the chain it pulled crosswise and caught fast against the outer side. To catch up its mate from the heap; to climb the chain to the window and loop the slack around a bar, giving a difficult but a real support to his feet, were acts of the next few moments. Then he assailed the bars themselves.

They were set in the solid ledge, which years of damp had not improved. He splintered the bone as he put his strength against it, but he wrenched the bottom of the first one loose, and pulled it out of its place. With it as a stronger lever, he finally loosened the second, then the third. It was break of day when, faint with exertion, he crawled through the aperture, wound the chain about his arm and let himself into the stream.

The weight made swimming difficult, yet he reached what he sought, a little boat, tied up at the opposite quay. The oars lay in its locks. Down below him were several other craft. Above the stream was clear. Up-stream he began, with his most powerful strokes, to row.

He had hardly begun his northward flight when the turnkey, charged especially to watch this prisoner, unlocked the door of the pit and saw a bare wall where a crouching figure should have been. He waved his hand before his face, to banish an imaginary mist,

muttering, as he did it, a potent charm against those devils which confound the sight. Then he glanced up at the grating. Only one of the four bars remained. A squeak and he was scurrying back through the tunnel to give alarm.

"Gone! He is gone, the Jew!" he shrieked, as he ran to the first guard he saw on the esplanade. The guard did not understand at once.

"By the grating, into the river!" He rushed to the embrasure and peered over. To the south were several boats; to the north one, two stadia distant, curling the water as it sped.

"What looks he like? My old eyes can not carry so far."

"He is bareheaded and there is something about his left arm."

"Haste, for the love of the old he-gods make speed! That is the man!" He sprang down the steps and went running up the river avenue, crying out to all he saw to give chase. Most of those past whom he dashed merely laughed. Some halted, wondering what brand of wine had so befogged the head of a seasoned man. A few followed him.

"What cried he?" a guard asked of him whom the turnkey had first met.

"The Jew—Ariel, is slipped from his cell. A detachment—and quickly; to the river and overtake him."

"Why such haste?" said the other. "At the end of the river is the gate and beyond the gate is the

Persian. Muster a few, go up the sides and take him leisurely, when he stops."

So it came that organized pursuit was begun before the Jew's bark passed the ends of the inner wall.

At first he did not know this, for the walls hid the street from his sight. But he began to see forms darting out of the gateways down below him. Shouts were exchanged from quay to quay. Warned of these, he bent to the oars, all his strength in the labor. His rides with Ista had gained for him some skill at the exercise. The race was in his favor as regarded the start, but the current threw its weight against him. Old Galeel, exhausted by his first sally, fell back, but he had made such a number understand him and had breathed such offers of reward that a crowd began to surge up the west avenue and along the quay, each eager to outdistance the rest. As they ran they called to others ahead of them to cut off the progress of the fugitive. Every time, before they understood, the little boat was on above. It met three or four fishermen, returning from early work. These put about, below the point of meeting, and came up after it.

The hour was one at which a volume of traffic was beginning to flow from outlying gardens into the city's heart. Seeing that some unusual thing was occurring or about to occur, scores crowded through the gates to look. Some hurried into boats. Wagers were placed and sage guesses were given freely. Noting the increase of the number, by boat and afoot, which gave him chase, the Jew put out the utmost of his strength.

The injured arm was failing and the weight of the chain was cruel hindrance.

He had a plan in his mind, and desperate as was his case the belief that the plan would succeed was with him constantly. Past the groves and vineyards of the outer district, with many a glance over his shoulder at the nearing rampart, he skimmed along. The pursuers, unencumbered, and better used to the water than was he, gained steadily. He knew they believed that he was going into a trap, and followed with the trapper's passion. His teeth were set and he made the oar blades bend like bows.

Right behind him arose the huge, green-tarnished gateway. Every turret about it was full of archers. Every gate was jammed, and the boats which followed began to form in a line from the east quay to the west. The crowd shouted to the towers that the man was a fugitive. An archer, from his place on the right, let drive an arrow which spat into the water less than the breadth of a hand behind the boat's receding stern. A second stuck into the wood of the stern itself, and stood aslant, its feathered base quivering before him. No more were shot, for a hundred voices from the banks roared out to the bowman: "Hiee, there; cease; shoot no more at the thick of him; his death will be your own death." By these and other explanations the bowman understood that this man must be taken alive.

The prow grated against the lower cross-beam, over toward the east foundation. A hail of jeers and

rasping laughter went up from the packed quays and from the turrets nearest the gate :

“Oah! Now, Jew, proceed! Go on; why halt, wise youth, when the race is so nearly won.”

Some of them on the east bank, eager to complete the capture, and with visions of rich reward in their minds, stepped out into the water.

As the prow touched, Ariel dropped his oars. He glanced quickly behind him, but neither to the right nor to the left. He said nothing, but in the turning of a second the railing crowds burst, altogether, into angry screeches :

“Look—gods, see there; shoot, you on the walls—go after him—the bastard dives!”

So quickly that no man of the rabble guessed the purpose until its execution was complete, the son of Levi had leapt up, turning with the same movement, and plunged head foremost, disappearing close to the brass beam. Away beneath the surface he found the ends of the grating. The current fought him as he writhed his way against it, under the uprights. It seemed to him that his breast would burst before he reached the surface, crawling up, flattened against the gate's north side. But, when the crowds believed him lost and washed down channel, he came up clear, and heard the yells burst forth again, as he gasped, and sprang, swimming, for the east end of the archway.

There was an angle in the buttress, forming a niche, deep enough to admit a man. He sprang into this, while the cries behind him, and from the walls



overhead, became a storm of directions for his capture, each advising a different plan. To the north, out hardly fifty paces from the farther edge of the moat, ran a low mound of fresh earth. Over it he could see a line of bright blue helmet crests, standing up fanwise from the dull brass of the caps.

His position, under the lea of the rampart, was sheltered from the arches directly over him, but not from those in the first tower on the west side. He heard a voice, loud in authority, call out: "Let the cleverest archer in this division come. He is to shoot to cripple, not to kill."

A grizzled face looked out of the turret window. Next moment a point hissed toward him and struck spitefully against the buttress close to his knees. The archer fitted another to his bow. It scored the brick, almost at his feet.

Beyond the nearest mound a Persian soldier stood upright and looked. Then he hurried to another soldier, like himself except that he wore a sash and a sword. The first had only bow and arrows.

"May the soldier speak?"

"Briefly, yes."

"A strange thing is yonder where the river goes in. A man came up in a boat, pursued. He dived under and hid by the wall. They shoot at him."

The officer gave a sharp command: "Bows forward!"

Two hundred men leapt over the low earthworks and ran half-way to the moat; then, at a sharp call,

knelt and let drive each an arrow at the turret nearest. Scarce had the shafts slipped when others were sent after them. In the suddenness of the action those on the tower turned from the Jew. More than one of Belshazzar's men were knocked from their perches, and more than one of the pride of Cyrus lay on the black ground, all quickly. Ariel hesitated not an instant. Under cover of the Persian volley he cleared the moat, almost at a plunge, and ran to the breastworks.

"Back," the commander ordered. Every Persian ran back to the line of mounds, excepting them that needed defenses no more. It all occurred in a space incredibly short, and the crowd that had gathered to see the young Jew taken alive went back to the city with the tale that he was led away by the Persians to be speared to death.

Behind the earthworks Ariel dropped on his knees before the officer.

"Who are you?"

"A Jew, named Ariel."

"You were pursued."

"Yes, I escaped from the palace pits."

"What was your crime?"

"I did none."

"Bah, so it is always. What was the charge?"

"There was none."

Another officer, taller and thinner than he who was speaking, came up. He looked at the Jew with an expression of dislike, and at the officer in disapproval. The first saluted:

"What occurred by the gate?"

"Lord, we saw this man come under. By the action they are his enemies. Thinking he might know secrets, I directed the advance to bring him away."

"A Jew. He has been in prison, by the chain."

"So he says."

"Then he knows nothing. Put him to death."

The tall officer turned away as if there were no more to do. Ariel sprang up from the ground, saluting in the Hebrew style.

"Noble Sir, this officer and his bowmen saved me but now. I could repay the service, to him and his commander."

The cool eyes gathered suspicion.

"May not I be taken to the commander himself?"

The lean jaws snapped. "If you know aught, tell it me."

"I know the means by which the city can be taken, but I will tell it to none but the chief commander. There are conditions."

"Your death were easily brought about, young stranger."

"Dead I will not serve you; living I may. And, Great Sir, be assured that I have looked death in the face. I do not fear him."

The Persian stared, as is the way of bold men suddenly met by spirits as strong as their own. Then, also in the way of bold men, he became suddenly mild.

"Come with me; only be warned; Cyrus the Great loves not a liar."

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## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE SUN GOD'S PAGEANT

**B**ELSHAZZAR was propped in a heap of cushions and a slave was fanning him, for he had just awakened and was faint from the dissipations of the last night. A tankard beside him held a pale vintage, always used to begin his day. Gur stole in:

"Galeel, the turnkey, craves leave to address the king."

"Does the turnkey know what hour it is?"

"He was reminded, oh, King, but he beat his breast and begged. He bids me say his coming concerns his life."

"Send him hence. Shall the king hear every petty murmur in his household before the first quarter of the day is done!"

The eunuch slipped back to the doorway. Thus it came that old Galeel, still beating on his breast, came out upon the northern esplanade a moment later. Kadric, on his way to the gardens, saw the gesticulation and approached:

"Greetings, old Lord of the Damned: why harry the fair air? Cease it; by the holy bull, another blow and that old bust shall fall to staves like a pail. What so besets you?"

"Oh, gods! bend down, Great Sir, I dare not utter it aloud; the Hebrew boy is gone!"

"What? Ariel? He?"

"Yes, he; betwixt the twilight feeding and that of the morning—ripped his chains from the walls—ripped bars from grating—up river like a bat, under the gates and away!" The old creature stilled his ravings and spoke low and fearfully: "Say not that magic is nothing, you who can talk with the stars; how else came man out of that place? Oh, these Jews; they can, a wink of their eyes and a word—pop—and a corps of devils is there to help them! Gods on high, that this old paunch should come to the stake at last!"

"What says the king?"

"The king says 'Out of the palace.' It wants two hours of the time for audience."

"He does not know?"

"Nay, mother of all mercies, that he did or that he never could."

Kadric rested a jeweled hand on the bony shoulder: "Galeel, how many prisoners have you had in your gentle keeping, in all your lifetime?"

"How many? Great Sir, the stars themselves are a handful beside that host. How many a thousand I could not say."

"And how many have you lost?"

"One. Never a one before. Others have tried, but this is the first to do it. A Jew, Great Sir, I say it again—a Jew is not mere man."

"How many, think you, know of the boy's escape?" inquired Kadric.

"Crowds followed up the river to see him caught.

They saw him led away by the Persian, to be cooked alive, as is the style of the heathen."

"But who of all these knows the particulars of his case?"

"None but a few of the guard."

"Be it far from me, Galeel, to plant deception in the heart of a subject. Yet, were I in your place, which I bless the gods I am not, I should——"

"Speak, in the name of the four-eared ass, I listen."

"I should swear the guards to secrecy. A little metal might tighten the covenant. I would keep silent myself. The festivities begin at midday. To-night, to-morrow, to-morrow night they continue. At their height, then I should beg some person at court, who was wise or foolish enough to suit the purpose, to tell Belshazzar the truth. While he is merry he might forgive. By the time he is sober he might forget."

"Can I dare hope, oh, Kadric, ever admired of me; could I venture to beg——"

"You can, Galeel. Indeed you have done it already. I will; just why I am at loss to know. Now, hark! If I come to the pits myself because of this, and you are alive or have a friend alive, remember me."

"Never shall the noble Kadric come to that. If he should, by the holy ones up yonder, he shall go free as though black art had done it. Galeel knows secrets unknowable to others." As he poured out this the turnkey glanced about to see that he was unobserved, then knelt and began to kiss the blue and white ribbons of the sandals.

"Up, man, waste no time in the like. Speed to the guards and make sure of their mouths. Here," he plunged his hand beneath his girdle and poured a stream of gold into the cupped palms. Galeel's jaw dropped; his limbs shook and he turned. Kindness struck him squarely and as a thing strange. As he hurried away the ex-priest heard him sob.

"What is it that has come upon me," Kadric asked himself. "Here do I woo the stake or the flaying knives, all for the sake of this old weasel. I have done it for the Jews, those poor blind children. Why should I care that they are about to go to the dust a little before the rest of us? It is the pure madness of them, maybe. Maybe it is something more. Oh, Babylon, I have loved you; I have been upon your heights and in your depths, enjoying both. I have seen you grow old, and very, very vile. I come to hate you. Carrion you are, and carrion should not lie above the ground."

By virtue of Kadric's advice it was kept from the king that the Jew was gone. Throughout the square the truth was sealed in those breasts that knew it. Ista did not know. There were those, long afterward, who believed that Blastus knew, but the blind one never told; it may have been through fear.

Having completed the slight formalities of the days of lamentation, the king and the court began, at noon of the day of escape, the real observance of the Feast of Tammuz.

The monarch, in pale silk overrun with belts of

opals, symbolizing the morning light, appeared on the steps at the west of the palace, there to review the parade which, for time immemorial, had been the opening of the coarser part of the festival.

From back to back of the winged lions there had been stretched a broad strip of blue cloth, which now cast its shadow upon the steps beneath. Rugs covered the steps themselves. Banners were everywhere, and seats, close down upon the avenue, were in readiness for royalty. The king and the queen came down and took their places. After them came all the household, those highest in rank the farthest down. Even the gates to the Garden of Love were thrown open and the tenants came upon the esplanade. All the royal musicians, grouped at the southwest corner, awaited the signal. The avenue was corded with humanity. The roofs of all the houses, to the north and to the south, were black with forms, heedless of the blistering sun.

So accurately were the ceremonies timed that, as the king took his place and signaled to the master of the musicians to begin, the head of the pageant appeared around the corner of the first great building down the street. It was a chariot, gilded over every inch of surface. In the bright light the eyes could scarcely endure the sight of it. Four fat bay stallions drew it, their coats gleaming only a little less brightly than the car. A young soldier, in armor plated with gold, drove. He bowed to the royal group and passed on. The outfit personified the Sun.



After this came other chariots in which rode soldiers, fully groomed for battle; beautiful light chariots, overflowing with fruits; files of slaves, afoot, carrying sheaves of wheat on their shoulders and sickles in their hands; then troops of sturdy boys, clad in every combination of color known to the dyes of Ur; then girls, in solid procession, all in white gowns and white sandals, arms and legs bare to the furious sun, crowned with caps of green leaves and carrying each a mass of flowers, of which one was cast at the king, another at the queen. Before the last of the section was past, the steps all about the royal seat were heaped as with odorous foam.

Lines of horses, of asses, of cattle and the long-haired goats of Nineveh came then, guided or led by slaves in livery. Then other chariots passed, heaped above the beds with full wine-skins, and ornamental ewers. After these, hailed by loud shouts and the broad jesting of the rabble, came an army of women, each riding on a horse. They were the selected representatives of the city's sisterhood of shame.

As they appeared, the master of the musicians stopped all the instruments, for a little space, his forked ivory baton upheld, while he turned to one, then to another group of players. Then the baton swung, as if to deal a blow, and, in ludicrous contrast to the full rolling of the old court airs, out leapt the high-keyed seesaw music which was the traditional call to the lowest nature of the kingdom's herd. And the herd went

wild. Men howled and flaunted turbans and leapt upon the shoulders of those nearest them, the better to see. Women laughed, and cast flowers and the chaff of speech at the passing crew. Ista bent down to the royal shoulder:

"Majesty, I remember my promise. I will show you the prettiest one of all, before her horse has rounded the corner."

"There she comes, now, the one on the bay, with nothing but the girdle and the circlet on," said the king.

"No, no," cried Ista. "Wait; there, she on the blue-black stallion, wearing—the chaplet of violets!" Ista clapped her hands. Belshazzer stared.

Huzzahs and the bawling of "Oah, Oah, Oah," announced, at the moment, that some unusual appearance had come into the avenue farther down. The thunders increased as the black horse pranced on. His rider was a shapely girl, who appeared to be about the age of twenty. She was clothed, as Ista had implied, in nothing whatsoever, not even sandals. The blue circlet held her black hair. As she rode she looked fearfully to the left and to the right, but she bowed her head when the brazen voices roared loudest.

Underneath the tumult of the mob there were growls of disapproval. The exhibition was a degree more wild than any one had ever seen in the Sun God's pageant. Many feared the God himself might be displeased. Others scouted the fear and roared

again. But the murmurs increased as the woman dropped her head.

"An overstep, that," sighed Kadric.

Ista heard him, and her look became troubled.

"How could you guess at her, so far away?" Belshazzar asked, sudden suspicion in his manner.

"Oh, Majesty," she seemed about to weep, "I planned her all myself; I thought she would be new; I dared believe the king would praise me when he learned it."

He took her hand in both of his, and petted the fingers while the rest of the pageant went by, and the trouble went out of her countenance, quickly as it had come.

With the passing of the final unit in the long line, which was exactly like the first one, even to the features of the soldier who drove, the king and the queen arose. A deafening shout went up from the roofs and the ranks on both sides.

The Feast of Tammuz had begun.

The time was dear to all the masses. Precedents, nobody knew how old, bade them now put aside whatever self-restraint they had. From noon of the day of the pageant until the second midnight following, the celebration would grow in abandonment. Then it would reach its zenith, and decline, and end the next day. Labor of every kind, except that which was done by slaves, was laid aside. Every inhabitant addressed himself to that pursuit which spoke loudest to his *nature*, and every one became his own law and its

enforcement. He who complained before a judge that he had been beaten or robbed, that his wife had left him or his child had been stolen during the festival was likely to have a smile as his remedy.

The crowds on the housetops came down and swelled the crowds in the streets. The wineshops could not hold their patrons. Many hurried to inns. Many others went home, to sleep before the wilder doings of night.

At sunset there was a general movement toward the river. As darkness came the quays became great amphitheatres and the river was turned into another avenue, greater than any beside. Boys and girls, older men and older women were together everywhere. Girls carried plumes which they brushed against the faces of men. The stream was gay with lights and the palace shot beams from every door.

In the throne room the king, now in robes the shade of emerald and with corresponding jewels, kept the occasion in traditional state. The queen and many a dignitary were there and the circulation of food and drink was regal indeed, yet merely an earnest of that largess which should mark the next night.

The merriment was warming to its height when Kadric, comfortably full of that particular drink which he esteemed the best of any press, strayed out of the presence. Hearing commotion over toward the bridge he bent his lazy steps that way. A troop of women were entertaining the crowds by diving from the top of a gorgeous barge. As each one sprang, clove the

water and reappeared, many yards distant, the populace shouted applause. Idling toward the gate the ex-priest saw a man, standing by the wall, and noted with some surprise that he was looking, not at the river, but up into the night. The look was curious. Passing beside him Kadric spoke:

"Good evening, friend."

"Good evening, brother." The face, now turned to him, was old and pale; pleasant withal.

"Are you sick?"

"A little, at the heart." There was that in the words, untranslatable in their fulness, which made the ex-priest look more closely:

"Surely to-night is an evil time to be sick at heart. This is the night when wounds of the heart are healed, never so easily."

"Brother man, it is not as you say. Here are we, under God's dear heavens, sinning our utmost and glorying in that we do. May He be merciful to us, who are so unmerciful to ourselves."

Kadric placed a hand upon his arm: "I am called Kadric; the court knows me. Will you come a little way from the portal? I have something to say."

They entered the shadow beyond the first great palace stair: "Are you not that Belteshazzar whom the Jews call Daniel?"

"I am he."

"The leader of the Jews?"

"It has been said that I am leader of the Jews, but the leader of the Jews is not a man."

"Ah. What I have to say bears import. I may speak safely?"

"Brother, I have striven to serve Jehovah while I have lived; I have yet to feel that he willed me to betray another."

"The Jews are doomed; the king has planned a massacre."

"I feared it: when do they begin?"

"About the first hour after to-morrow's midnight. Every male of the race is to die."

Daniel was again looking into the sky: "Is there an earthly way by which this error can be averted?"

"I know of none. I speak that you yourself may escape, perhaps with some whom you particularly love, if there are such. I myself might offer some means of bribery."

Daniel pressed his hands against the speaker's arms: "I too have decided that there is no earthly means to our salvation. Therefore other means will be provided. He who leads the Jews has this in His care."

"You hope for a miracle? The priests of the temple speak of miracles; yet you confounded them, upon a time, in the Great King's day. I myself was one of them. I know how miracles are done."

"You a priest of Belus?"

"I was; I am no more; yet even in that priest-craft, if it be done in earnest, sir, there is something noble."

Daniel took him by the hand: "There is some-

thing noble in anything done in earnest. Some believe they worship idols, yet, behind a mask, they worship God Himself. And some who believe they worship God do only give His Holy name to the idols they love the best. Thanks for the warning. Now, again, by what name may an old man keep you in his gratitude?"

"Kadric."

"I have heard it spoken, by Jews and without revilement. It shall be uttered in my prayers. Good night."

The ex-priest watched the figure go slowly down the river avenue and disappear in the throng. A louder flourish of music came from the royal room. On the esplanade he stopped, and looked up, as the patriarch had looked. Foremost among the blazing constellations was Orion, the Mighty Hunter, treading upon the Hare, his prey. But Kadric did not see him.

"Could it be?" he mused. "The Hebrew drew the pith of his faith from this very valley, aforesaid. His first representative wandered hence, to plant a people in the land of Canaan. Could it be that his seed, while other peoples have blundered and groped after God, through clumsy myths and frightful ceremonies, has found Him, and learned what the Magi know not, and the masses have never dreamed?"

Again and again that night, while the wine ran crimson, and the music throbbed and the dancers spun, the question rose above the froth of his mind.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE EAR OF THE GREAT

**T**HE headquarters of Cyrus the Great was notable for a simplicity which reflected a heroic plainness in the prince himself. West of the river, less than the length of an English mile above the city and in the midst of his host, a flat tent, on upright poles, covered a smooth-swept space. Excepting a roll of blankets and a chest, the space was bare of furniture. Indeed, save for its greater size and the uncommon beauty of the weapons, lying in order across the chest, it might have been the tent of any soldier in the camp.

The conqueror had been afield. At his return he gave his mount into keeping of a groom and was turning to his chest when the officer, leading Ariel by the wrist chain, came up and stopped in a rigid salute. The conqueror came out into the sun. Still young, slender, his every movement proof of pent energies, he was one who might have won a second look in any part of earth. His countenance, open as the noon sky, was stamped altogether with determination. The Jew quailed, not with fear for himself, but with the feeling that a crisis was at hand. It leapt to his thoughts that the things he would ask could never be wrenched from this inexorable soul.

To the senior officer: "Speak."



"Oh, Prince, this was pursued to the gates. He dived under. Our archers covered his flight to us. He says he would speak with you."

"Leave him here." Then, to Ariel: "Come under the tent. Now say it directly; Cyrus is busy."

"Oh, Prince, would you hear from my lips how Babylon can be taken?"

The dark eyes flamed: "Mean you that Cyrus needs help other than he has?"

"I know not of that; alone you may or may not take it. In either case the siege would be long. I would tell the prince how to sack it whole before three nights are gone."

"How?"

"Will the prince hear a word beforehand? I am a Jew, come hither out of Judea, meaning to aid an hundred thousand of my race to break their yoke. You see the chain; my labors came to that. Yet I can tell how to take yon city. There is a price."

"What?"

"I ask, in return, the liberation of my race."

The dark eyes turned from side to side: "To what end?"

"That they may go back to what God gave them; to Palestine, there to rebuild Jerusalem."

"How think you, Jew, here and helpless, to dictate terms to Cyrus? What you know you shall tell: terms afterward."

"Noble Sir, the Jew will have the terms or keep the secret. I was near to death this morning. I

may be nearer it now. But death has become as a familiar shadow to me. I will tell nothing I do not wish told, though this army cast its wits together to devise new tortures."

"Jerusalem, that is toward Egypt," mused the conqueror. "You speak of terms; are there others?"

"There are two others. First, I must know that the sacred vessels, brought from the temple when Jerusalem was pillaged, shall be restored to us, whose treasure they are. Last," the Jew lifted his right hand and his face suffused, "I demand that I, Ariel, son of Levi, be given to slay the King Belshazzar with mine own hands."

The eyes of Cyrus danced: "You love them not, I see. Now tell me how to take the city."

"And all that I ask—"

"Is granted. Know, youth, that the word of Cyrus never was broken."

Ariel knelt on the tent floor and, with a link of his chain, traced figures on the smooth earth. Cyrus watched, absorbed as a child.

"I speak, oh, Prince, of what I have heard, more than of what I have seen, yet I know what I say. This line is the north wall; here the river goes under; here runs the main stream above; here, to the west, the great canal. Two miles to the north of us the Isle of Cranes lies in mid-channel of the river. There the course bends westward, cutting so near to the canal that a spear might be tossed from the bank of one to the bank of the other. They draw apart as

they descend. That earth is soft. *And the great gate's lower beam is twice a man's height from the bottom.*"

"So much!"

"At least. Mounted men could ride under *were the river turned from its course.*"

"Ah, but the river walls inside! They are defended; we should be entrapped!"

"Oh, Prince, in all my nights in Babylon never have I seen the gates of the river made fast. Moreover, the Feast of Tammuz is beginning. Guards and populace are wild with wines already."

The Persian took up his sword: "Jew, I have promised what you ask. Promise me, now, one thing, else here and now I slay you, and forgetting this plan, lay siege to the walls as I meant to do. Promise that never, to man, woman or child, you will reveal this stratagem."

"Oh, Prince, glory is far from my aim. I seek deliverance of my race. Revenge is its own reward. I promise."

While the archers in the turrets about the river gate were yet discussing Ariel's flight their attention was drawn to a movement far up-stream. A great crowd of men, thrown into massed order, marched northward.

"Hah, they leave; they have given up the fight," said one.

"Nay, it is the Jew; they are carrying out some punishment," said another. Another said: "You are *both* wrong; they are going up the river, as if depart-

ing, only to march westward, then back, to renew the siege in another place."

Of old the spade was well-nigh as important in the soldier's outfit as the spear or the bow. Before midday a little army, working as nearly together as might be, were trenching the fat earth through the neck of land, across from the Isle of Cranes. At each bank they left a solid portion undisturbed. The soil cast up was heaped in the river, building out a promontory. Greatly as its mass was wasted by the current, it grew and dammed the half from the isle westward. Two hours at a time, then the men were shifted. Next day the work went on. Ariel had had his wristlet removed, and now was given the habit of a soldier and permitted freedom of the camp. Ignorant of the meaning of what they did, the soldiers delved. The second day the watchers from the towers, observing the increasing foulness of the waters, wondered anew. Anon the word that the Persians had fallen into battle among themselves was passed along the wall.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### OLD COMRADES MEET

**K**ALLAI sat in the east doorway of his khan in Jerusalem, tapping his fingers together and looking woefully at the back of his daughter's head. She stood, a little way out from him, very straight, her arms, ending in two small tight fists, extended rigidly down her sides.

"Nana, my Rose——"

She turned quickly, and her head tilted back a little more. There were tears in her eyes, but she did not mean that one of them should fall.

"Well?"

He put out his arms, as a father puts out his arms to a sulking child: "Come to thy father, sweet."

"I will not——" Then the tears burst, and she fell upon his shoulder and was nestled there, with old endearments. But they lacked the former fulness of comfort, for she kept saying, brokenly: "When will we hear of him, father; when will he come; why is he so long, if God is with him?"

"Child, God's ways are His. Be patient. Thy heart shall not be starved much longer. And do thou torment me no more to take thee to Babylon, my Rose." He put on a look of exaggerated terror. "To that place, so great, so sinful; no, no! Never! The wolves would devour thee."

"But *he* is there."

"I know, I know, but he is coming back to us, quickly, oh, it will be quickly."

"I know he is; he said he would; but now—now he is *there*. The days are long, my father. Ah, go, go and take me"—she plunged again into the forbidden appeal—"take me there; maybe he needeth me; Daniel himself might find a place for me; who can tell! And I could work, and God would bless me, and we could all come home together. Oh, father, take me to Babylon."

It was the repetition of what had occurred, time after time, for days past. The pleas were all outworn, and so were all the terms of the denial. The fond father, looking out blankly to the East, and searching his thoughts for something in the way of answer, felt his heart leap, that moment, as he saw the canopy of a dromedary bob into view, beyond the farther side of the old stockade. Then the beast came through the gate. Father and daughter ran down to meet it. They saw, beneath its awning, a strange man, with a rough scar on his left cheek, and a great hole in the lobe of each ear. Ista's envoy had turned in at the first place offering hospitality: his beast was weary, and so was he.

Kallai had difficulty to understand the few barbarous words in Hebrew, and the many gestures with which the newcomer conveyed his order, that the dromedary be kept till called for.

"He is from Babylon, is he not?" Nana asked anxiously, the moment he was gone.

"Surely, yet he hath no merchandise, nor did he speak of any business whatsoever. His manner is not that of them that travel much. It is passing strange."

"When he cometh again, I will speak with him."

"Nay, it were more maidenly not."

"But he might tell us something—he might know how—the Jews are faring. I will ask."

"He never would tell, though he knew. Sawest the yellow in his eyes? Shun him. Sing to me now."

"Then thou thyself shalt ask him."

"I will, child; now sing."

She took up her harp, but her fingers slept on the strings.

Dilapidated as Jerusalem was, it still was a city. Never was city which had not within it all strata of civilization; never was man who could not quickly find his own therein. It lacked a little of the sixth hour after sunrise when the envoy left the khan. Evening found him, crouched over a platter of food and a swill of wine, in a low public house in a distant quarter, toward the north.

As he was sitting thus another man came in. He was thick-set and toothless, and his face was beaten out of any shape. As he passed, the envoy looked up, then stared with quick prankish intelligence, and called softly:

"Alorus, Oah!"

The other started, as though the point of a knife had stung him, and whirled toward the table. Then his battered face was transformed and he reached for the hands, stretched toward him:

"Hea, old Snake of the Barns, you! Am I drunk! No, by the man-bull it is you. Tell me, what brings you here?"

"You first, and with it, tell me what kissed you. I never would have known that face. Your shoulder-blades I should have known among the damned, at midnight."

Alorus drew up a stool and began: "I came across, in the business, intending to gather up a chain of young girls, for sale at the next great feast-time. I was to join a caravan, east-going out of Sidon, for the journey back. The third night after I came to this place—may it suffer forever—I saw a well-grown girl steal up a street, alone. I caught the bird, never easier. I had the blindfold on and the gag in place—she was mine, as sure as ever a catch was mine—when the thing happened. You may have heard that parts of this place are bewitched. One of their kings, Solomon I think they called him, was a sorcerer, and he left cohorts of devils on guard over hidden treasures when he turned his face to the wall and died. One of them seized me. I saw nothing, but my head was beaten with invisible hammers. When I awakened, the girl was gone and I was alone and only half alive."

Hea, listening, clapped his hand to his head: "You tell of devils," he began solemnly. "They *do* stand



guard over Jews. It comes to my mind; not so long ago, I and my friend, the sly Nimru, were hired for a pretty trick, nothing easier. We were to wait, close by an old wine warehouse, by the river, below the square, and put away a certain old Jew, who was to come out of the door, on a certain night. We waited. Out came a man, walking slowly along. We slunk behind him. Nimru went first, and then he fell back. I laughed." Hea laughed again at the recollection. "Then I went behind him myself. I was to know him, by certain markings. He stopped, and the light was on his face—gods, what a light it was! It was like the witch-candles in the rushes. It blinded me and my arm was struck numb."

"Devils! The air was full of them, all around you," said Alorus, with fearful earnestness. "Me? In the morning passers-by found me—I could not move for the pain in my skull—and carried me to a healer. When I was able to travel I went to Tyre. Five beauties, of my picking, were shipped ahead with the last caravan that left Damascus. They must be there already. I, too, am going. One other shall go with me."

"She who cost you your face."

The countenance turned livid: "Yea, I have sworn it. The power that struck the blows I leave to the gods. Shall a man be made like this and let the thing pass! Not if Alorus is the name of him!"

"Know you who she is?"

"Blessed be luck, I do. Two days ago I passed

by a khan yard over toward the east side, and I heard a girl's voice singing. The wall was between us but I know that voice. It is one easy to remember. I found that she is the child of the keeper, one called Kallai."

"Marvelous is chance," quoth Hea. "My dromedary, even now, sleeps in his khan. I saw the wench with these eyes, since an hour-glass could have emptied twice."

"So? Gods! I may want help of you, if you will. We two have cast the serious dice together, often and often, why not again?"

"Well thought. Listen to me." He leaned over the platter and whispered. "I too have something to do here. It might mean a cottage in toward the square and slaves, and favor forever. Help me; I help you and we return together."

Their pact completed, the Babylonians pronounced certain intricate charms against demons. Then they began to take such quantities of wine as the keeper of the place seldom served on any occasion. Midnight found them there. But, in the hour before daylight, they remembered their business. And in the morning, when Zeth, the son of the widow Basmath, started to pasture with his goats, he saw two strange men toiling at the heap of stones on the temple floor. Creeping up the slope he gained a better view. They were lifting block after block and dashing them aside. The heap was a third removed. He flew to the khan yard. Kallai knew, long since, that a treasure was

stored there. He started at the news of the violation:

"Quick, son, here, on the dromedary, out the Beth-lehem road, then to the right, to Heman's tent, and tell him. I will haste to the hill and keep eye on the ruffians till he cometh. My Nana, tarry here and fear not."

Heman received the tidings from the breathless messenger. His eyes flashed, then he smiled as one who is vexed for a moment:

"Go back, son; say to Kallai that I bid him ask those children of hell what they seek. They will answer, 'Nothing.' Then let him say that Heman, Priest of the Temple, sends word that they shall find it! Myself, I need not go."

Back at full speed and into the yard he went, full of the consequence of his message. He hoped to see Nana but she was nowhere in view. He hurried, afoot, to Moriah, expecting to find the khankeeper hidden near by. The elevation seemed deserted. Hesitating at first, he took courage to advance toward the scattered remnant of the stone heap. Behind it lay Kallai, hands and feet bound with strips of his clothing, senseless from a blow over the skull.

Running back to the khan he called aloud. The house was empty. He went to the stables; the beasts were gone. At the same time west-bound travelers on the Jericho highway met three dromedaries, hard driven. On the first rode he of the scarred cheek. His friend was last. None might see who rode the one in the midst. The canopy was shut on every side.

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At about the time that those who watched from the turrets on the middle of the north wall saw the waters begin to thicken with mud, those near the north-west corner descried a soldier on a white horse, going south like a leaf on a wind. He rode beyond bowshot and they knew it, yet, as he passed, they shot at him idly and sent curses after every shaft. He answered neither, but kept his way, in a right line parallel with the western rampart.

Out a little way from each of the hundred gates, the Persian genius had stationed a squad of ten soldiers. A cordon was thrown around Borsippa. As he passed each squad the rider paused long enough to deliver a message, by word of mouth, to its captain. This he did before the Gate of Lions. The captain, a lank arrow of a man, received the message without sign of interest:

“Cyrus commands that any person falling into hands of guards be treated as a captive of war, unless the person be a Jew. A Jew is to be treated as a guest of Cyrus.”

The courier had not completed his round of the city when three dromedaries filed around the southwest corner of the old park and bore wearily in. The first and last beasts were urged on by repeated cries and frequent blows. Plainly the travelers were in haste.

“Gods, it is good to see the walls again,” said Alorus. “Hail, old city of mine.”

“Why speed you so fast?” cried Hea. “The brute’s

tongue hangs; the sun is two hours from the edge, yet you ride as if the gates might shut before we cross the bridge."

"Aye, but the feast is beginning. Even now the avenues are thick as snake-holes. Have I brought a virgin across the sand, nursed like a lamb all the way, for nothing! She and the others I sent before should be on sale this hour. The bidding is better when the belly is not too full."

This dialogue, taking place while the tired beasts, now knowing their journey near completion, began to put out the last of their strength, was lost on Nana. Crouching under her canopy, unable to understand a syllable, she knew only that she was being taken to Babylon, and that somewhere in it was the son of Levi. As all the world knew, few things were sacred in Babylon, but commercial value was near it. For Nana's sake, deep thanks for this. As she saw the crest of the rampart, overtopped by the palace and the cone of the gardens, she breathed again, for the thousandth time:

"Be kind to me, my God; I am alone."

As the beasts swung into the last mile of the journey, Alorus shaded his eyes with his hand and looked. Then he halted his brute with cruel abruptness.

"Look yonder, Hea; what do you see this side of the moat?"

"Soldiers, surely; the guards must be at practise."

"No, they stand still. Can it be that an **enemy** holds the gates?"

"By Ishtar's flesh, there was a handful of Persians up above the north wall when I came away; but they were sickened. Nay! Hold the gates! There are not enough spears in the world. I wager you, timid: those men are of Babylon."

The camels were close to the last bridge when the Persians, at a word, formed two bodies, one on either side the highway.

"Look yonder, Hea, fool! See the uniforms! They are Persians," gasped Alorus. He tried to turn his dromedary around. The jaded creature, resenting the effort, was slow and gave the shrill cry of its kind. Before the turn was made they were surrounded.

"Dismount," the captain ordered. A look at the two men told him of what race they were. Even the crushed features of Alorus kept the stamp.

The captain ripped apart the middle canopy. Nana had drawn its curtains close as she saw the mailed men. Understanding the gesture, if not the word of the command, she made the brute kneel and stepped out.

"This one surely is of the westward peoples," said the captain. "Who of you knows a word of Hebrew?"

One came forward: "I know a word, a word only."

"Speak it to her."

"Jehovah," said he, in a loud voice.

Believing that she was commanded to pray, she knelt and lifted her clasped hands.

"This is a guest of Cyrus," said the captain. "Spear the males."

Before the sun went down against the desert the corpses of the two companions, thrust through and through, drifted lazily in the first canal beyond the moat. They had been searched. In the girdle of Alorus was a scrap of writing, calling for delivery to him of the persons of five female slaves, described in detail, taken from his hands by Nimuz, at Damascus. In Hea's belt they found a few small coins. The saddle hampers were empty.

In the twilight Nana was taken, with the dromedaries, to the camp. As the escort arrived the conqueror looked up from the diagram, still traceable on the floor of his tent.

"What have you there?"

"Three dromedaries and a Jewess."

"Bring the woman."

The terrified Nana, glancing out of the curtains as she rode through the camp, had seen unbelievable numbers of rough, lean, warlike figures, all eying the unusual equipage with vulgar interest. The little feet came near to mutiny as she was led to the tent, under which the strong man in the shining armor still bent over the marks in the ground. The last of the child was gone from her. Cyrus looked up and saw a woman, magnificent after all she had endured. She looked at him with such dread that his lion's heart was touched, for an instant.

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"Let Gobyrras come."

The chief of staff spoke many tongues, including Hebrew.

"Say to this woman that she is safe; then ask whence she came, and why."

"She was seized at Jerusalem, oh, Prince, and carried hither against her will," the chief translated.

The brows of the conqueror bristled together. He had ordered impunity for Jews; he had not thought of Jewesses. The camp was the camp. Already he repented that fiat which had cast such charming driftwood into his iron discipline.

"What friend does she know in the city?"

When this question was made known to her Nana brightened bewitchingly:

"Sirs, there is one within those walls, who, did he know that I am here, would come out to me. He, too, is of Judah. His name is Ariel."

"Your brother?"

"No, but he would come out to me."

The conqueror's look became strange.

"Or, if my lord will graciously grant it, I will go to him."

Cyrus stared: "Knows she not what siege is?"

Then followed a jargon in Hebrew: "I have explained, oh, Prince, but she says she could slip through somehow. She desires to try."

Cyrus smiled a grim smile, all of relief. Then it faded: "No. The word of Cyrus was given; it shall



stand. It were an easy riddance to the camp if she went, as she wants to go, but she shall stay. Keep her hidden till darkness, then give her a tent, and a soldier's garb and gear. With heathen fevers and heathen arrows, there are empty ones enough."

A little after sunset another tent was pitched in the Persian camp, a little apart from the others, and near to that of Cyrus. Its sides were let down, and an assortment of war harness was carried inside. When the full darkness fell, the dromedary was led up, and the maiden went in and was left alone.

The son of Levi had been up by the Isle of Cranes ever since sunrise, watching the deepening of the ditch and the corresponding lengthening of the dam, which the toilers were projecting close over against the left bank of the main stream. Night came before he reached his own tent, and he was weary and begrimed. But he found a messenger waiting, to take him straight to Cyrus, and he followed, dreading lest some whim had chased the plan from the commander's strangely simple mind.

Cyrus was sitting on the chest in his tent and his sword was across his knees. A little torch, stuck into the ground, gave light enough to show that he was alone.

"The noble Cyrus summoned me; I am here." Ariel folded his arms and let fall his chin upon his breast.

"Son of Levi, Cyrus wastes no words. In a tent out here"—he jerked his head—"there is a soldier,

in need of virtuous comradeship. I, Cyrus, command you; go with the messenger, and render it, and keep silence."

Ariel's wonder deepened as he followed the guide to the closed tent. There the guide left him abruptly. He put his hand to the flap and hesitated. Then he pulled the flap aside, and spoke, in Aramaic, into the pitch darkness inside:

"I am Ariel, the son of Levi. Who is within?"

He heard what was more nearly a gasp than a cry. Then the stir of armor joints, and then there stepped into the starlight to meet him a figure as straight as his own, but chiseled in a shape more splendid; mailed, as was he, and armed with the spear and the dagger. But the warlike trappings, and the half light and the utter surprise collapsed altogether in his mind, before a still small voice within him, telling him who it was. He wrapped her up in his grasp, with a pressure which was felt through the plated corsage, and his kisses were rained against her unresisting lips. He lifted her and carried her into the tent, and held her on his knees, as a sleeping child is held. She was strangely still.

"Nana, Nana, speak to me. Hast fainted?" He shook her.

"No," she whispered, "I was saying something to God."

They were silent for a little time. Then she spoke:

"Now tell me everything that hath happened since my father left thee—everything."

"Thou first; tell me all."

She told him, directly and with a child's candor, of the ache in her heart when he was gone; of the long nights when she could not sleep for thought of him, and for fear of danger to him; of her prayers to her father to take her to Babylon to be with him; then, of the coming of the stranger, and the surprise at the khan, and the long journey and its ending.

"And now, mine own," she pressed her hands against his cheeks, in the darkness, "tell me of thyself. Why, thy cheeks are wet! Why are the tears there?"

He put her away from him gently, and bent his head down into his palms and cried, half aloud and inconsolably. Surprise struck her, a swift deep surprise, and she asked, in a voice that choked at every word:

"Has it been evil with thee?"

He braced himself to the resolution. It had not occurred to him to lie.

"Rose of Jerusalem—O God that I were fit to call thee more—forgive me those embraces I gave thee; I sinned against thee when I gave them. I will tell it all."

He did tell it all. The black contrition which ruled his spirit forbade him to hold back any part of his own shame. The narrative, indeed, dwelt least upon those incidents which were more to his honor.

"And now," he concluded, "I have but this left to comfort me; that I know that the plot against the race may yet be thwarted, and that the plot against

the treasure failed of itself. And I will see thee safe—poor girl—thou shalt wait here in security. I myself—I will go in at the forefront. I will take what I have claimed. I will pay my debt to the king, with a dagger, and then I will die, and it comes to me that death will be swift, and sweet.”

She had heard him, in silence, standing apart, interrupting once or twice, in terms which he did not interpret; nor did he try. He had not reckoned on forgiveness. At the end there was a long pause.

“I, too, have one thing left to comfort me,” she said brokenly.

He did not reply.

“Wouldst care to know what it is?”

“Yes.”

“Thou hast sinned, almost past forgiveness of God, yet thou didst not sin quite to the uttermost—I mean in thy madness over the heathen woman—thou didst not? Say it to me again.”

“No. God saved me. I did not.”

There was another pause. Again it was she that spoke:

“I have more to be glad of, Ariel. I am glad thy flesh is clean. I am glad, too, that a man who fell so far can now repent so manfully. I could almost ask—”

“What is it. I will answer.”

“Dost—dost love me, Ariel, as well as thou didst?”

How long they clung together, and how much they said to each other none ever knew. Time is of eter-

nity and motionless. Only consciousness has to do with hours, and they were conscious of nothing beyond the possession, each of the other. The romantic end of night was passing when the Jew took his leave. She tilted back his helmet, the better to see his face.

"Beloved, I fear these wild men, with their armor, and their daggers, and their savage looks. Be near me all the time."

"Be near thee! Never a moment will I be beyond sight of the tent by day, and never a night but I will bide here with thee till I am bidden to go. And the time will be brief, as I told thee before. And on that Night of Nights, when it is time to march, Prince Cyrus himself shall leave thee under care of a chosen bodyguard, every man of whom would defend thee with his heart's last drop."

"No, Ariel, he will leave no guard for me. I will need none."

"I swear that he shall. I will ask it myself. See what the decree for the salvation of Jewish captives did for thee and for me."

"But the woman whose name is Ista, she will be at the feast, with the king, will she not?"

"Yes; why?"

The beautiful face, upturned to his, was set with a fierce-burning resolve:

"No, no; Prince Cyrus shall leave no bodyguard for me. See here, my sword, my breastplate; I am a soldier! I am a Jewess, too! And when my love goeth in to smite the king, I go by the side of him!"

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE SACRILEGE

**I**N THE city the following midday witnessed a sight rare even in that lawless age. All vices of a people essentially vicious were exalted. Every street was ringing with gross song. Loud ribaldry was everywhere. Men fought in the thoroughfares for women as drunken as they. Maudlin companions of youths, carrying girls on palanquins of cane, went this way and that way, pursuant to some satyric rite. Pennants, aflame with obscenities, flaunted from staffs. Each turban carried its gay cockade. Under the roar of voices one might hear the cries of children, lost from mothers who had forgotten their motherhood.

The throne chamber stood ready at evening. Chains of freshly cut flowers wound every column, from base to chapter, making it seem that the flowers upheld the elephants' heads and the balconies. Incense was sprinkled on the floor and swept away. All over the esplanade thick rugs were spread. The festal lounges were placed, in the form of a long rectangle, in the center. Those of the king and queen were at the west end, nearest the dais. The east end was left open. Tables, set within the rectangle, left room for the ingress and egress of them that were to serve the feast. Under the balconies cushions and benches were arrayed, for

this was the night when all the household of the sovereign was to sit at meat with him.

A little after the falling of darkness this place became alive with ladies of the court and officers of the empire, parasites of high degree. Hundreds in number, they formed a galaxy about the lounges, awaiting the coming of Majesty. All watched the door to the right of the dais. Through it he and his queen would come.

A trumpet blew, deep in the palace. A fanfare answered from the spaces under the balconies. Belshazzar, in the pomp of the royal violet, followed by the queen in pure white, came forth and stood beside the throne. A boy ran up, presenting him a goblet. Dashing the red wine to the floor he cried:

“Tammuz, to thee!”

“Tammuz, to thee!” The great hall trembled as the many voices repeated. The music blared again and the royal couple went down to their lounges.

Relentless custom governed the position of the guests. The nobles were nearest His Majesty, the others distant according to rank. But the women found such lounges as they chose. The choosing reeked of mirth—and jealousy.

Myriads of slaves now came running in with wineskins. Up the spaces between the parallel tables they hurried, serving all. The girls of the Garden of Love found places about the pillars or under the balconies. With informalities which left each banqueter free to his inclinations, the viands and the liquids were loaded

on the board. It was of custom that nothing known to the sybarites of the royal square was missing from the Tammuz orgy. Moreover, without distinction of rank, the luxuries were for all. A jargon of talk, pealing laughter, music on every side, and service which was of gold and of silver were elements in the scene.

The daughter of Lael was not among the concubines.

At the moment when the ladies were permitted to choose their places, Ista had sprung to the king's side, opposite the queen. Farther down the noble Kadric lolled by the side of a daughter of one of the lords of the council. She was not the loveliest lady there, but no one could have guessed that the ex-priest knew it, hearing him say: "Our mother nature loves an oval, therefore she made your eyes, my dear; I bless her name again."

Kadric had felt unlike himself of late. Considering this, he reasoned, as has many a man, before and since, that added stimulants would right whatever was wrong. In that conviction he was plying himself with the best. Across the table the sightless Spider, lying so still that he might have been asleep, kept trace, by his superhuman ears, of all that passed. His girls were stationed at the column nearest his feet.

Belshazzar called for silence: "Now shall Ista sing to us the king's song."

It was an old song, inseparable from the feast, and, many believed, exceeding in dignity all hymns of the latter bards. Standing, she chanted, rather than sang:

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"O Babylon, my Babylon,  
 Thou art the heart of kingdoms wide,  
 Thy ramparts veil the risen sun,  
 Thy portals mock his noonday pride;  
 The moon may hide, the stars may run,  
 But thou dost stand, O Babylon!

"Belov'd of gods, to east and west  
 The famine's bony wings may spread  
 But still for thee the wine is pressed,  
 Thy orchards bend, thy mouths are fed  
 With flesh and bread; thy nightly feast  
 Goes on till dawn is in the east.

"The bloom may burn, the leaf may blight  
 Beyond thy walls, O Babylon,  
 But hour by hour, by day, by night,  
 Thy hundred thousand fountains run,  
 A rainbow spun in every one,  
 My Babylon, my Babylon!

"Thy foes like locust swarms may hem  
 Thy moat with bow and beam and mace,  
 But they and those who follow them  
 Shall find thee in thine ancient place,  
 And still the race thy pleasures run  
 Shall keep its way, by night and day,  
 O Babylon, my Babylon!"

It had ceased to be a custom for the priests of the temple to sit at the feast. One equally sumptuous was spread for them in their own place. While the last line of Ista's chant was still in the ears of the hearers, two of the Magi came in toward the lower end of the rectangle and without a word began to perform their mysteries. By dint of arts which need not be

explained they made fountains to spring up from cups, and flowers to grow great and disappear before the eyes. They caused the air to fill with magical birds. Lastly they unrolled a white sheet, blazoned with old Chaldaic signs. This they cast over themselves, and when slaves hastened to lift it the priests themselves were gone. Then jugglers came, then the dancing girls, singers and wrestlers. As each new entertainment appeared the banqueters rested on elbows, watched for a little time, then fell again to that before them.

The night was a third gone when the king stood up, unsteadily:

"List, all my people; know ye who I am? I am Belshazzar! The feast is not done. We have eaten, we have drunk, from silver, from gold, from glass. Now shall we drink from the ruins of Jerusalem."

He sank back in his place. Immediately a train of slaves came, each bearing a tray with a load of vessels, curious things of precious metal, all strange to the crowd. There were vases, chalices, ewers, chargers, cups of the lightest mold and great bowls set with rare stones. As the slaves passed about the lounges each guest took that vessel he chose. Then the harem girls and finally the slaves of all degrees were given them. The wine was poured and there was many a jest as they drained the sacred things.

Outside the palace thick tongues were bawling praises of all gods in heathendom. Shrill cries were echoing here and there. About the king's board reek-

ing lips were being pressed against the nearest cheek. The wearied attendants, seeing the progress of the influence, began openly to neglect the guests and to apply themselves to meats and vintages. Ista spoke:

“Has Majesty forgotten?”

“Forgotten? Forgotten what?”

“The Jewess and her bridegroom.”

“Oh, that; of a verity no. Ho, friends, we have looked on Jewish metal; now look on Jewish pride. A virgin of the race has chosen a husband for herself. Ye shall see them, and witness the tastes their women display. Bring out the two.”

A guard came forward, tremblingly:

“Oh, Majesty, the maiden is here, but a strange thing has befallen. A moment ago the monster we held in the antechamber fell on the floor and died.”

The king and his guests were hushed. It was as if death, striking thus near them, was a prefiguration. The queen put her hands to her face and complained of a sudden illness, and was led from the chamber by her maids. The royal head went up:

“Bring the young Jew.”

Hearing this, Kadric was sobered, suddenly. He had not yet kept his promise to the turnkey. The blood went out of his face as he remembered it. In the same moment, Daniel and the sublime unreason of his faith that some salvation, providentially ordered, should be sent down to the Jews, shot into his mind.

Just then the queen came in upon the dais, from *the left door*, to return to the banquet. As she entered

her eyes were caught by a slender ray of soft light, which seemed to pierce the length of the hall, high over the table, angling downward from the east to the west. She stopped, and looked so fixedly that Kadric, who was watching her, uttered an exclamation.

"Is Her Majesty entranced!"

The king turned toward her.

"What see you in the air, my Queen? The magicians are gone."

She pointed toward the eastern architrave:

"The light! What is that light!"

The long bar, dim at first, was brightening each moment. A broadening, gleaming beam, it stretched above the tables and the galaxy, above the dais and below the overhanging panoply of the throne, and struck the plaster, over against a candlestick. Where it struck, the banqueters, now rising up to look, saw a bright dot, which expanded and became a circle of incomparable white.

"How?" cried the king. "I ordered it not: what is this thing!"

"That is no comet," said Kadric, in a hushed voice.

The Lord Blastus sprang to his feet: "Speak, you with eyes; what see you? Speak!"

"Oh, look!" shrilled Ista.

On the face of the circle there was a blinding glimmering. Then out upon the disc, from the left side, moved the fingers of a hand, white as the light itself. Slowly they moved, tracing lines on the disc. Not a sound was heard. Each guest clutched the

shoulder of the guest before him. Then the hand was withdrawn and over the space in which it had moved the face of the disc was changed. Dark lines appeared and deepened and stood forth in awful clearness. And this was the character of the writing:

M U P  
E L H  
N E A  
E K R  
M E S  
E T I  
N E N

The letters were Hebrew, the oldest form, and unknown to all who saw them. Belshazzar staggered up from his lounge; his eyes bulged and he was hoarse: "Bring hither the wise men!"

Slaves, frightened as were all, disregarded law and sped through the tunnel to interrupt the sacerdotal feasting. Arbec, with the five next in rank below him, followed by the huddling blacks, was in the great hall before the first clutch of horror had loosened. Belshazzar was cowering on his lounge:

"Whosoever shall read this writing and show me the interpretation thereof shall be clothed with scarlet and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom," he gasped, not taking his eyes for an instant from the wall.

The priests, when they saw the appearance, trembled as the king and his guests had trembled. They conferred among themselves, in whispers.

"Majesty," said Arbec, "we know not what this is. The characters are in a language unknown and the arrangement of the signs is unlike any we have seen."

There were exclamations of dismay around the board. The slaves, clinging together under the balconies, began to pray. The queen spoke:

"Let not the heart of Majesty be troubled, nor his countenance changed. There is a man in Babylon in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of Nebuchadnezzar he was made master of the Magians and was famous for solving riddles and the interpretation of dreams. Now let him, who is Daniel, be called, and he will show the interpretation."

Belshazzar spoke to Blastus, who had listened to all that passed, unable to grasp its meaning: "Send for this Daniel; you should know where he hides. Haste!"

The banqueters were as if frozen in their places. Those who spoke spoke in whispers. All eyes were drawn to that bright disc. The dread of the unknown held them.

Two slaves flew to Daniel's quarters. They found him kneeling, and he was in those garments of pure white in which he had addressed the Jews in the garden. The king's command was given:

"Now blessed be Jehovah, the hour hath come," he said. Taking up a roll of something bound in linen he went between them. When they appeared the king, who had remained as a graven image, pointed to the light:

"Are you the Daniel who is of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king brought out of Jewry?"

"Majesty, I am he."

"I have heard of you, and that the spirit of the gods is in you, and the light of understanding. The wise men have been brought to read this writing and interpret it. They can not. Read it to me, and you shall be clothed in scarlet, a chain of gold shall be over your breast and you shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. Read."

The patriarch glanced once at the wall and replied:

"Let thy gifts be to thyself and give thy rewards to another. Yet I will read the writing and make known the interpretation."

So saying, he went to the upper step of the dais, to the left of the light, and turned. The riddle, its words translated, was somewhat thus:

N G H

U I E

M E D

B W D

E D I

R E V

E N I

D O D

R K E

E C D

As he glanced from the wall to the quailing hun-

dreds and began to speak his face kindled with a light resembling the light of the disc. His voice arose. Through the hush it rang from end to end of the great space, filled every ear, deep, rolling, triumphant. So standing, he hurled down upon the monarch that supreme denunciation which filled him, and all those about him, with a ghastly fear. When, at last, the doom came, "Thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians," the queen was clinging to the king's knees, and Ista shuddered at his side. His chin was on his breast, and his look, drawn to Daniel as if by the power of lodestone, was that which a corpse wears when life has gone but an instant, and the eyes stand staring after it. Then he laughed, a keen delirious laugh, and shrieked:

"Clothe him with scarlet; put a chain on his neck and proclaim him the third ruler in the kingdom!"

The Spider, crouching, turning his head now this way, now that way, through the dread recital, now started up with a cry:

"Hark! Wait! Be still, fools. What is that!"

To all other ears the hush was complete, except that, down below the square, the revel was at its zenith. But the blind man, listening, burst out:

"Guards! Guards! The gates; the gates; the gates; the gates!" Still screaming, he darted out through the eastern portal, alone, guided by the lightest draught of air. On the esplanade his alarm pierced louder:

"Gods! Hell of the heathens; help! They are in the river; the Persians, the Persians! Guards, to the



gates!" He stumbled against a soldier who had sunk asleep beside a plinth. He seized the soft hot throat:

"Up, bitch's whelp!"

The soldier, aroused, sent him reeling with a blow in the breast. On, along the eastern esplanade he rushed, redoubling his cries. The guard, just awakened, ran from his post to the post of his next companion to the north. The other, whom something else had aroused, came running down to meet him.

"What is it, Orum?" stammered the first.

"God of the gods, look down and see!"

Forward, along the river's channel, came a dense phalanx; helmets giving back the starlight; a forest of spears; each soldier advancing at a pace which was almost a run.

At the moment another guard came flying up from the South Side.

"Flee; they have torn down the walls; they pour through the avenues like a flood; the square is surrounded!"

Loud, raucous, as if from everywhere, came a pealing, like thunder, close in on every side—the din of the tocsin, crashing out the signal for the charge. Before the more deeply drunken sentries were awake; before those who were already awake had rallied from their shock, a torrent of men dashed up every flight of steps. It was a rush, yet there was order in it. Every guard who stood his post was swept down instantly. The host was like an armed wall moving. **Bronzed men, with set faces and shining eyes, they flung them-**

selves at every palace door. Then the shrieks of women went up, and the groans of men struck down arose from the floor.

At the boom of the tocsin, the noble Kadric slipped from his lounge and went quietly to Daniel, on the steps.

"Great One, I take it that we are on the brink of a long parting. Farewell. I have not believed in your God. A few moments hence and I may see Him. Perhaps we twain shall meet, sometime, in a world less cruel than this. Who knows?"

Daniel seized hold of the edge of the noble's robe: "Stay thou here, close by me. We are in Jehovah's presence *now*."

As he said this he slipped from its wrapping and unrolled something which was unfamiliar to the few who saw it; something which had been great, and was almost forgotten, yet was to be great again: a banner of clearest white, crossed by two broad parallel stripes of blue, enclosing a double triangle, blue also—the colors that waved above the Exodus—the Hebrew Flag.

Right in the forefront of that wave of men which first burst in from the eastern doors and dashed toward the foot of the tables, there came the son of Levi. He was in shining mail. He held a spear poised in his left hand, and in his right a short, straight, two-edged sword. At a glance he might have seemed one of the many and no more. But they were intoxicated with the joy of slaughter. They struck

promiscuously at men, and laughed as they seized upon women. He was deadly cool, and set to a single purpose.

At his right came another soldier, smaller than he, and wearing the armor with a peculiar, distinguishing grace, transforming even the clumsy stiffness of the gear. The face was white as lime, but will was written all over it. To the left and the right the blades and maces of their comrades hewed and swung, but the sword hung useless in this soft hand. Arms were not made for such as the Rose of Jerusalem. Above the uproar she cried to Ariel:

“Find him, and strike, in God’s name, and then take me away; I sicken.”

The son of Levi saw the king before the speech was ended. He leapt forward, between the cowering banqueters, toward the royal lounge. Nana went with him. She saw the miraculous light on the wall behind the chair, and she saw, too, a woman, with very beautiful shoulders, crouching beside some one in purplish raiment, on the lounge at the head of the double line of tables. The woman’s eyes were fixed on Ariel, and their glare was green. If Ariel saw this look, or her who gave it, he made no sign. Straight on he leapt. A short table stood between him and the sovereign’s seat. Quickly he swung the end of it out of his way.

The king sat, huddled, with his back toward Ista and his profile to the Jew. Not a man of his bodyguard remained about him. His queen had fallen in

a swoon. Now the incarnation of vengeance was upon him.

With one knee set on the edge of the lounge, his sword uplifted, his body tense to deal the blow, the son of Levi cried out in a loud voice:

*"Belshazzar, Oah!"*

The cry was keen as the taste of victory. It was his thought to cause the ruler to turn, to see and know him—and in that moment to split that studded diadem and the skull within it.

There was a twinkle of cold light against the violet of the imperial robe. That moment Belshazzar, the Regent, the last of the Kings, lurched forward with a mortal groan and slid to the floor, stuck deep, between the ribs. From the side of the lounge the Lady Ista darted up, and forward, holding a little narrow, bloody dagger. The Jew saw a flash and felt a sting, and then a deadly pain in under his right armpit. His sword fell out of his hand. He saw the flash of the little blade again, and swerved, trying to poise his spear. Then the lights became dizzy, spinning wheels before his eyes. "Die, son of a dog!" he heard her scream. But he heard no more, for he pitched, face downward, upon the legs of the dead, under the edge of the tables.

Ista stabbed at the breast of the Jewess, who cried out as she bent over the fallen form. The point glanced harmlessly against the overlapping armor scales. She struck again, for the joint of the thigh, as the Jewess knelt. That stroke was stopped in time. A heavy

mace, swung by a Persian decurion, who had pressed up close behind the Jewish pair, came down across her forearm, and the delicate bones cracked under the blow. The decurion seized her by the hair and cast her aside. Another moment and Passion's Namesake, she who had held the realm in her two hands, was trampled down and overrun—one fragment in the ruin of a race whose doom was overdue.

Outside the army was sweeping everywhere. Riot was hushed by ruthless death. Close to the head of the northeast landing, on the esplanade, the sightless Blastus lay brained. Down in the avenue the corpses were strewn like mown grain, and across the city, towards Borsippa, the warriors from the hills drove, seized and slew. But the rigid discipline held, even in this wild slaking of their blood-thirst. Not one of David's race was killed, or ravished, or despoiled of anything. The word of Cyrus had gone to every man: "He who wishes to be crucified, head downward, let him harm a Jew, or that which a Jew has, and his wish shall be to him."

In the palace the red storm was over quickly, for the invaders filled every door before a blow fell. Gobyras, chief of the Persian staff, was first to reach the dais steps. He glanced at the waving flag of the Zionists, then at Kadric, suspiciously, then at Daniel.

"You are a Jew."

"I am."

"And this beside you?"

Daniel caught the ex-priest to his side:

— "Spare him: he is my brother."

## CHAPTER XXXV

### LOOKING WESTWARD

Of many useful arts which Jews had long since forgotten, the arts of healing were among the least. Now there was a son of Levi lay in a fever which had come to the weakness of a babe. The fever had been Belshazzar's. If its walls had been heard many things; none more than the cries of the sick man, when, in his hot delirium, he believed himself to be in his race up-river to the gates of the garden, watching the heathen who he spoke in Hebrew. In his tenderness, and then his love of Jerusalem.

He opened his eyes and gazed long and who watched about into another. When he opened of them. He might have crowned with a just above him

"Nana" he

words would have been inaudible but for the expression of the lips: "Oh, Nana!"

"He mendeth, my dear one," said the patriarch. "I seemed to know that he would. God loveth us"—Daniel smiled, a little, tolerant smile—"God loveth us better than we love one another. Thou canst not understand that yet, dear one, but it is so."

Already the sack of the city was complete, and even Borsippa, the Fair, and the Royal Nabonidus with all his host, were surrendered without condition. Already, too, the particulars of the manner of the entry of the Persians into the city was in dispute. For Cyrus the Great had a mind that the stratagem might be useful again. After the sack he caused the waters to be returned, with all possible speed, to the regular channel. A column of his men, left in camp for the purpose, moved down, as soon as the archers forsook the walls, and clove a great gap in the rampart, west of the river gate, and came through it to join the destroying host. All this was done while the subjugation of the city was yet in process. Thus the story went out that the entry was by siege direct. Went also the word of the entry as it was, and many a wilder tale besides. The contradictions there begun are echoed from shards and cylinders and through the literature of all succeeding times.

How the gallant Persian kept his promise; how in due time the Jews were given leave to go, and how Zerubbabel, according to the wish of Daniel, rode before them as their leader, and among them were

borne the vessels of the temple, are things which histories tell.

But they do not tell that, in the ranks, on a lordly camel which was a gift from Cyrus, rode the son of Levi, and beside him Nana, mounted as was he. Nor is it written in any other place that with them went Lael and his wife, and their child with the golden hair.

There was joy among them and before them, for a swift courier had been sent, as soon as the city was taken, to tell Jerusalem of the New Day. Hearing this, the aged Heman had ceased his lamentations and Kallai, in his ecstasy, had become the foremost spirit in the popular rejoicing. All the city was united in plans for a reception which was to surpass another reception, to be accorded, centuries afterward, to One who was to enter Jerusalem by another way.

The patriarch, standing on the palace stair, embraced Zerubbabel, whom he was to see on earth no more, then turned to Ariel. The expedition was ready to leave and over its vanguard floated the old, old banner with the blue triangles and the parallel bars. His eyes filled.

“Son of Levi, forget not thy work in the joys that await thee over yonder ; thy pleasures will remind thee of themselves. I would that I, too, might go with thee, but my task is here, and it shall not be very long. Say, for me, to thine uncle, the worthy Heman, that it shall be long ere all the prophecies are fulfilled, and that some shall deny the fulfillment after it cometh, but that goodness shall grow and blossom in the hearts



of whole nations. Say, too, that I bless him, and thee, and all thine, because he sent to me a man, who became God's voice, lifted up in the flesh."

Daniel paused a moment, watching the light on the eager face.

"But forget not to add that I give the honor, the glory and the exaltation, all unto the Lord Jehovah. Unto His servants my old heart giveth—nothing but love."

THE END

# Reviews of The Court of Belshazzar

New York Tribune

We are told that Mr. Williams is a young newspaper man of Indiana, and that this is his first novel. We say, then, that he has done something which gives unusual promise of high achievement, and which is in itself an achievement of more than ordinary merit. For seldom have we read a new writer's first work of so grandiose a style which so impressed us with the mark of something approximating genius. It is by no means free from errors and blemishes, but they are all minor and readily corrigible; while all through it is instinct with virtues of the truest type. The plot is simple, but it is epic in its simplicity. The construction is deft, firm, coherent. The narrative is expeditious and convincing. The description will be criticised by some as meager, but we ourselves hold that to be a great merit; for it is quite impossible for any one to-day to know precisely what the details of decoration, costume and conduct were in Belshazzar's day, and we hold it the best art merely to suggest appearances with a few assured strokes and leave the completion of the scene to imagination.

The story is drawn from that greatest and most neglected of all sources of literary and dramatic inspiration, the Old Testament. It tells of a young Hebrew who goes from the ruins of Jerusalem to Babylon to aid in the redemption of his race from bondage; of his temptations and perils at Belshazzar's court and of his marvellous victory over them; of the coming of Cyrus and the fall of Babylon; and of the triumphant course, through all the stupendous drama, and of the pure love of a man and a maid. The reader will not find in it the

supernatural naturalism of "Salamambo," the encyclopedic elaboration of "Ben-Hur," or the discursive vastness of "Quo Vadis." But if he be judicious he will joyously perceive in it a human vitality no whit inferior to the best that is in those noted works, and a net merit entitling it to a place in their category, and that by no means the lowest. We could point out to Mr. Williams a number of verbal infelicities which we are sure he would himself recognize and hereafter avoid; and we could indicate various typographical errors which should not appear in a volume bearing so authoritative an imprint. But these are notes in a sunbeam. We prefer to indulge the one great thought of gratitude that here is a true historic romance of entrancing beauty, of triumphant power and of most auspicious promise of further literary and artistic creation.

### **The San Francisco Call**

Earl Williams makes his bow to the American public and presents in his first novel, "The Court of Belshazzar," an interpretation of life in Babylon during the captivity of the Israelites and their deliverance by the Persian, Cyrus, after his conquest of the Chaldean kingdom. It is a great theme, one that has not occupied the attention of the historical novelist, and one to which Mr. Williams appears to have done full justice.

In using this material as the background for a romance he has dealt with the people and the land of Israel with a reverential mind, with sympathy for their sufferings under the ruthless hand of the conqueror and appreciation for their noble aspirations.

Perhaps the average reader will be most interested in the vivid pictures which the author draws of Babylon, the Lady of Empires, the sensual sumptuousness of the court and the defenseless condition of the captive Israelites  
" might almost be said the hopelessness into which

they had sunk. Ariel, the young Levite, is invited to court that he may be induced to betray his people, but goes there to act as a spy upon the king and his ministers and find out their purpose regarding the Israelites.

If for no other reason this romance should command a very large circle of readers on account of the fidelity with which it presents the Babylonian court, its rulers, people and civilization. And what strikes one most forcibly is the similarity between the characteristic barbarism of the ancient autocracy and that of the Huns we are fighting in France. Mr. Williams shows great skill as a character delineator and descriptive writer.

### **The New York Times**

The great civilizations of antiquity have furnished theme and inspiration for the pen of many a novelist and, doubtless, many another will yet find in them material that will never fail to be fresh and enthralling. The author of "The Court of Belshazzar" is the newest recruit to this army of writers that delve into the past to find rich backgrounds and great personalities for the weaving of their romances. But, although he is the newest of recruits, for this is his first novel, his work entitles him to stand well forward in their ranks. For not only has he studied his times and his scenes and endeavored to make his picture true—and that is the first requisite of the historical romancer—but also he has the imagination to make the picture vivid and the creative power of weaving scenes, incidents, events, into a coherent, moving tale that marches along with something of the inexorableness of life. It must be said for him also that, notwithstanding the nature of his story, he writes with discretion and restraint and has not succumbed to the temptation which assails many romancers of using unlimited paint and too gorgeous colorings.

### **The Sun, New York City**

It is an ambitious essay that Earl Williams makes in his first work of fiction, "The Court of Belshazzar." He draws upon ancient history for his plot and narrative, and so at once brings to mind Sienkiewicz and Lew Wallace—"Quo Vadis" and "Ben-Hur."

Mr. Williams is fortunate in that it cannot be said of this book that it resembles either of these masterpieces. He has had the good sense to tell his story in his own way. And the story is exceptionally well told, starting out at a moderate pace, the plot gradually unfolding and increasing in interest as the book goes along. The writer has reserved his best efforts for the denouement and climax. He exhibits also a rare faculty for excluding non-essentials.

The story of Ariel's escape and of how he reached the armed forces of Cyrus, which were besieging the city; the dramatic appearance of the Rose of Jerusalem and the exceedingly ingenious suggestion of the author's as to the means by which the hosts of the Persian King gained access to the inner walls of Babylon are told in a dramatic way.

### **The Boston Herald, Boston, Mass.**

In "The Court of Belshazzar," Earl Williams shows the instinct of a romancer and the diligence of a historian. The cruelty, luxury and degeneracy of life in the crumbling "Lady of Empires" are vigorously portrayed. Daniel is a minor figure, with his interpretation of the flaming message that gives warning to Belshazzar's fall. With the coming of Cyrus, the victorious Persian, the curtain falls: Mr. Williams' debut is a full-blooded story.

45





The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry, no matter how small, should be recorded to ensure the integrity of the financial statements. This includes not only sales and purchases but also expenses, income, and transfers between accounts.

The second part of the document provides a detailed breakdown of the accounting cycle. It outlines the ten steps involved in the process, from identifying the accounting entity to preparing financial statements. Each step is explained in detail, with examples provided to illustrate the concepts.

The third part of the document discusses the various types of accounts used in accounting. It distinguishes between assets, liabilities, equity, revenue, and expense accounts, and explains how they are classified and balanced. It also covers the concept of debits and credits, and how they are used to record transactions.

The fourth part of the document discusses the importance of internal controls in accounting. It explains how internal controls help to prevent errors and fraud, and how they can be designed to ensure the accuracy and reliability of financial information.

The fifth part of the document discusses the role of accounting in business decision-making. It explains how financial statements provide valuable information to management and other stakeholders, and how this information is used to make informed decisions about the future of the business.





